

The Delta and Gold Country Training & Resource Center presents

Authentic Youth Engagement

Putting Youth on the Map

**July 21, 2015
1:00 pm—4:00 pm**

**South Sacramento Christian Center
7710 Stockton Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95823**



FREE IN-PERSON TRAINING



- Learn the basic fundamentals to empower youth, including how to progress up the ladder of youth engagement
- Learn about the '[Putting Youth On the Map](#)' tool, a powerful resource for youth and adults to ensure youth well-being
- Learn the basic concept of Youth Participatory Action Research and how this can benefit your work with youth

For more information, please contact:

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lrodriguez@healthedcouncil.org
916-556-3344

Register at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YouthEngagement_July21



Youth Engagement Training

HEAL Collaborative

July 21, 2015

Arnell J Hinkle, RD, MPH, CHES
Executive Director



Today's Game Plan

- Introductions
- A bit about CANFIT
- Why Youth Engagement?
- Tips for working with youth
- Review Strategies & Case Studies
- Discussion

Opinion Line

CANFIT

To work with communities & policymakers to develop culturally resonant policies & practices that improve food & fitness environments for adolescents in low income communities & communities of color.



About CANFIT

1. Community and After School Training & Technical Assistance and Consultation

2. Projects

- Simple, Easy, Effective (Snack Guide, Active8, 99 Ways)
- *Culturally-relevant* materials (Spanish RFS)
- Up-to-Date Youth & Community Focused (PHAT, MO, E-Advocates)

3. Policy Advocacy – *State & National*

- TCE (HEAC), Kellogg (F&F), Kaiser (HEAL), IOM



{ 99 WAYS }

TO MAKE YOUR
AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM
EVEN **HEALTHIER**

TOOLKIT INCLUDING SIMPLE IDEAS ON HOW TO:

PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING | PROVIDE TIME FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY | INCORPORATE CULTURE
MAKE STAFF DEVELOPMENT A PRIORITY | PROVIDE YOUTH WITH POSITIVE ROLE MODELS
ENGAGE YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP ROLES | GET FAMILY INVOLVED
USE THE COMMUNITY AS A RESOURCE | EXAMINE MEDIA AND ADVERTISING
PROMOTE A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE | COLLABORATE WITH SCHOOLS
WORK IN COALITIONS | BECOME A BRIDGE TO HEALTHCARE

Many of the ideas in this handbook may be appropriate to be adopted as policies for your program.

99 MANERAS

PARA MEJORAR LA SALUD

Y HACER SU

PROGRAMA DE DESPUES DE ESCUELA

TODAVIA MAS SALUDABLE

ESTE FOLLETO INCLUYE IDEAS SENCILLAS PARA QUE USTED:

PROMUEVA LA ALIMENTACION SALUDABLE/ INCLUYA ACTIVIDADES FISICAS/ INCORPORE LA CULTURA/ CONSIDERE EL DESARROLLO DEL PERSONAL UNA PRIORIDAD/ SELECCIONE PERSONAL EJEMPLAR PARA LOS JOVENES/ ASIGNE A LOS JOVENES EN POSICIONES DE LIDERAZGO/ PROMUEVA LA PARTICIPACION DE LA FAMILIA/ UTILIZE A LA COMUNIDAD COMO UN RECURSO/ EXAMINE LOS MEDIOS DE PUBLICIDAD Y SUS ANUNCIOS/ PROMUEVA UNA IMAGEN CORPORAL POSITIVA/ COLABORE CON LAS ESCUELAS/ TRABAJE EN EN EQUIPO/ SEA LA CONECCION CON EL CUIDADO DE LA SALUD

Muchas de las ideas de este folleto pueden ser apropiadas para adoptarse como pólizas de su programa.



ACTIVES

(ACTIVATE)

**CANFIT'S 8 STEP PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDE
FOR ADOLESCENT YOUTH IN AFTER SCHOOL
AND COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS**

- ▶ Learn 8 Steps to Get & Keep Youth Active
- ▶ Promote Health at Every Size
- ▶ Activity Picture Guide Included!

Why Youth Engagement?

- Investment in the future
- Reduce health disparities (Health Equity)
- Insight into a different culture
- Generation Tech
- Peer outreach
- Unique voice (that attracts media)
- Innovative, creative, positive energy

Theories and Realities

- Youth Development Models
 - 40 Assets
- Authentic Youth Engagement
 - Ladder

Ladder of Youth Participation

Degrees of Participation

Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults

Youth-initiated and directed

Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth

Consulted and informed

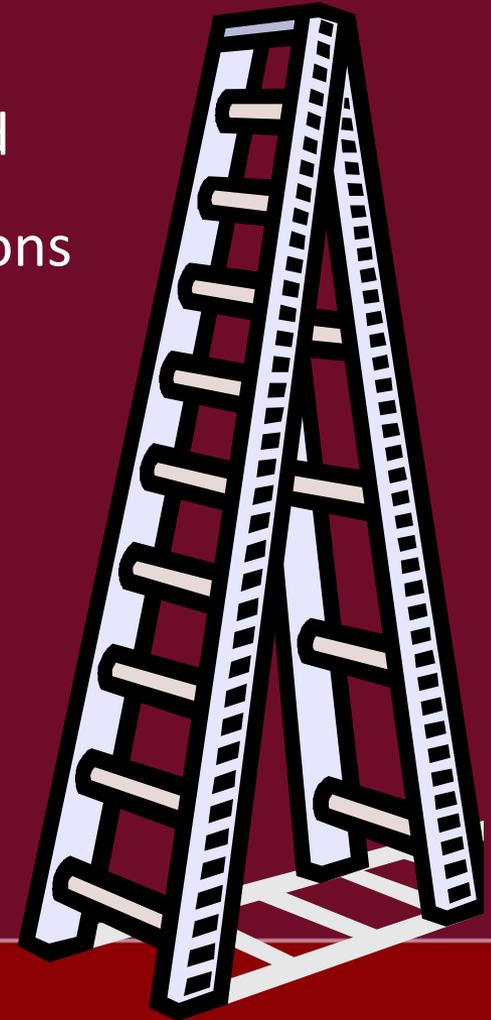
Assigned but informed

Tokenism

Decoration

Manipulation

Non-Participation



To Consider:

- *Why you are engaging youth?*
- *What level of engagement?*
- *How you will engage youth?*
- *Youth realities:*
 - ❖ *attention spans*
 - ❖ *school responsibilities*
 - ❖ *family commitments*
 - ❖ *economic needs*

Sustainability Issues

- Funding
- Staffing
- Program Models
- Leadership Development
- Current Trends
- Cultural Issues – Youth Culture

Who's Your Audience?

Basic Model of Communication

Sender	Message	Channel	Receiver
Credibility	Content	Effectiveness	Targeted



(Adapted with permission from MEE Productions ©, 2006.)

Table Activity: A/CA

- 2 "Youth"
- 2 "Adult Allies"
- 1 Facilitator
- 1 note taker
- Brainstorm as many counter arguments as you can in 5 min.

Arguments

Against Healthy Eating

Arguments

Counter **A**rguments

- I Like My Foods (Lifestyle, Culture, Stress)
- Why? What's the Incentive/Motivation?
- I Eat What my Family Provides Me
- My Parents/Elders Do NOT Eat Healthy
- Thin "is NOT in" for us... (The Culture)

Arguments

Against Physical Activity

Arguments

Counter **A**rguments

- Where? No Programs/Group Activities
- Why? My Parents Don't Exercise...
- When? No Time with Homework & Chores...
- I'm NOT good enough for Team Sports
- I'm Young, Not Exercising Now Can't Hurt Me...

How Do You Reach Youth?

- Connect w/ Today's Culture & Needs
- Argument/Counter-Argument;
“Be Prepared To Argue Myths”
- Utilize Various Media Outlets - Radio, Social media, Video-Based (ex: YouTube)
- Use peer-to-peer methods



Group Agreements or Guidelines

- TRY IT ON FOR SIZE
- IT'S NOT OKAY TO BLAME, SHAME, OR ATTACK – YOURSELF OR OTHERS
- IT IS OKAY TO DISAGREE
- PRACTICE SELF FOCUS
- STEP UP, STEP BACK
- PRACTICE “BOTH-AND” THINKING
- 100% RESPONSIBILITY
- MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY
- NO CELL PHONES OR MP3 PLAYERS
- “LAND THE PLANE”

Planning – Issues to Consider

- Assessments
- Flow
- Resources
- Learning Theory
- Evaluation

Case Study 1:

- Youth Participatory Action Research
 - Surveys
 - Community Mapping
 - Photo Voice
 - Advocacy

Polling Question

- Which levels of the *Ladder of Youth Participation* were utilized?
 - Manipulation
 - Decoration
 - Tokenism
 - Assigned but informed
 - Consulted and informed
 - Adult-initiated, shared decisions
 - Youth-initiated and directed
 - Youth-initiated, shared decisions

Case Study 2:

- MO Project
 - Skill-building
 - Creativity
 - Peer outreach
 - Contest
 - Advocacy



Polling Question

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 - Tokenism
 - Assigned but informed
 - Consulted and informed
 - Adult-initiated, shared decisions
 - Youth-initiated and directed
 - Youth-initiated, shared decisions

Case Study 3:

■ ALIYEFF

- Youth Convening
- Youth/Young Adult Teams
- Strategic Planning
- Social Media
- Skill development and practice
- Advocacy

Polling Question

- Which levels of the *Ladder of Youth Participation* were utilized?
 - Manipulation
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Case Study 4:

- *“Inspiring Youth, Growing Change” examples*
 - *Work in Small Groups*

Polling Question

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 - Adult-initiated, shared decisions
 - Youth-initiated and directed
 - Youth-initiated, shared decisions

Ten Tips for Engaging Youth:

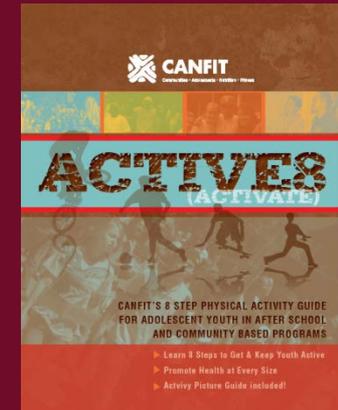
- 1. Work in Youth/Young Adult Teams
- 2. Use Energizers
- 3. Keep Sessions Short (15 min or less)
- 4. Provide Lots of Interactivity and Movement
- 5. Ask and Listen – share stories

Ten Tips for Engaging Youth:

- 6. Utilize contests and games
- 7. Hire them
- 8. Develop leadership
- 9. Expect accountability
- 10. Share decision-making

Questions??

Pair/Share



- Something you learned today
- Something that you'll do differently as a result of today's workshop
- Something you will share with others

CANFIT

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Polling Question

- What is the most effective way to communicate with youth?
 - Flyers
 - Face Book
 - Tweets
 - Texts
 - Conversations
 - Interactive Lectures





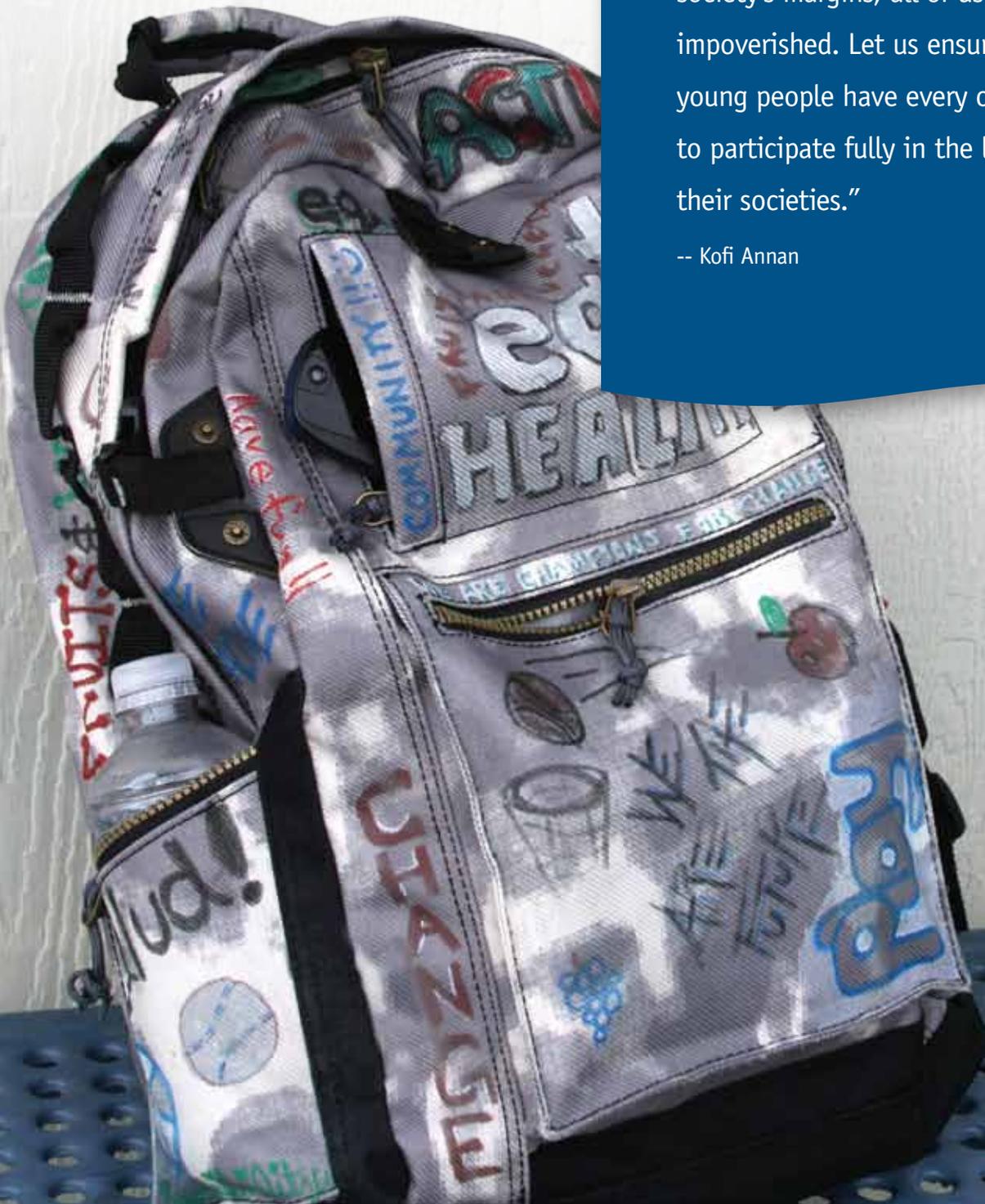
Inspiring Youth, Growing Change

Nurturing Strong Minds for a
Healthy Community



“Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.”

-- Kofi Annan



Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude and respect for the hundreds of youth who made the commitment to improve health in their communities. Your commitment, creativity, and passion are contributing to making California a model for youth-led obesity prevention efforts.

To all the adult allies who go the extra mile on behalf of youth, your dedication is much appreciated. Special thanks to local project staff who contributed their stories and insights for this report, including:

**City of San Bernardino Parks and Recreation Department,
San Bernardino County**

Traci Burnett, project coordinator
Matthew Douglas, adult ally
Glenda Martin Robinson, project coordinator

**Del Norte High School, Del Norte Unified School District,
Crescent City**

Johanna Dantzman, adult ally
Deborah Kravitz, project coordinator

Mountain View Middle School, Lamont School District, Lamont

Manuel Ramirez, adult ally
Yolanda Ramirez, project coordinator

Orange High School, Orange Unified School District, Orange

Patty Maize, adult ally
Kat Soltanmorad, project coordinator

Santiago Creek Day School, Orange County Department of Education, Santa Ana

Kat Soltanmorad, project coordinator

**San Lorenzo and Tennyson High Schools, Project EAT, Alameda County Office of Education, Hayward
and San Lorenzo**

Chris Boynton, project coordinator
Leah Mowery, adult ally

Zane Middle School, Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services, Eureka

Marianne Hutchins, adult ally
Colleen Ogle, project coordinator



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Inspiring Youth, Growing Change

Report Objectives

The *Network for a Healthy California (Network)* initiated this report to learn more about the impacts, successes, and challenges of the Youth Engagement Initiative (YEI), which began in 2006. A primary goal of this report is to document changes resulting from the local projects, from the youth in the project to the built environment.

This information will also inform continuous improvements as the program evolves. While this report is not intended to be a full-scale YEI evaluation, our goal is to share ideas, lessons learned, and reflections with others who are interested in engaging youth to improve health and well-being.

This report seeks to capture an understanding of themes that can inform future health promotion and youth development work. Common patterns and unique experiences gleaned from interviews with key project staff help to tell the YEI story. The successes, challenges, and changes described begin to paint a picture of trends, impacts, and implications of this work. There is great interest in this work and in expanding this initiative. The lessons learned demonstrate that young people can be a key part of implementing solutions to our most pressing health and nutrition concerns.

A primary goal of this report is to document changes in youth eating and physical activity habits, which resulted from the local projects.

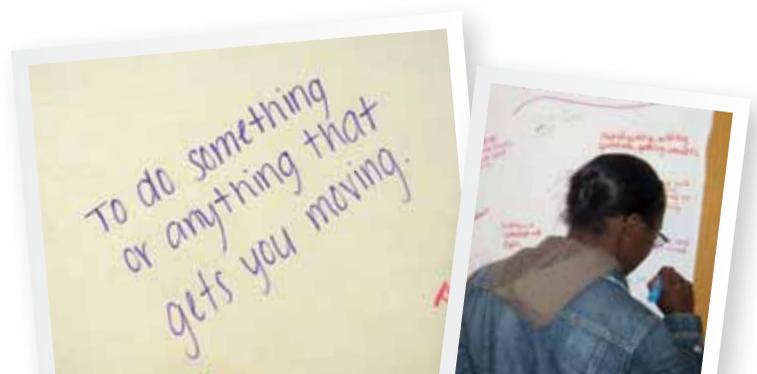
WHAT DATA INFORMED THIS REPORT?

Key informant interviews with adult allies and project coordinators from local project sites are the primary basis for the findings in this report. An independent consultant interviewed 13 adult staff from seven project sites, along with four State *Network* staff.

The YEI project sites profiled in this report were selected based on longevity and geography. Our intention was to capture impacts and lessons learned from projects with the most experience in the initiative, supplemented by reflections from a few newer sites. Projects are located in urban and rural communities throughout California. Due to logistical and resource limitations, the youth

voice is not directly represented.

During guided conversations, interview participants answered a series of questions about their experiences. We asked key informants to describe results from the youth research projects, along with their initial expectations; challenges, surprises, and lessons learned; and their hopes for the future. A complete review of program materials such as culminating reports, youth survey results, training curricula, and Internet research also informed this report.





LOCAL PROJECT SITES INTERVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT

Youth Research Teams	Project Start Year	# of Youth Leaders Involved	Grade Range	Project Coordinator	Adult Ally
CHANGE, Del Norte High School, Del Norte County	2009	15–20	9th–12th	Deborah Kravitz	Johanna Dantzman
Fresh Crew, San Lorenzo High School, Alameda County	2006	15	9th–12th	Chris Boynton	Leah Mowery
Humboldt Health, Zane Middle School, Humboldt County	2009	8–12	7th & 8th	Colleen Ogle	Marianne Hutchins
Lunch Bunch, Orange High School, Orange County	2006	10–12	9th–12th	Kat Soltanmorad	Patty Maize
SASH, Mt. View Middle School, Kern County	2006	12	7th & 8th	Yolanda Ramirez	Manuel Ramirez
Youth Team, Santiago High School, Orange County	2008	10	9th–12th	Kat Soltanmorad	Cyndie Borcoman
Youth Teams, San Bernardino, San Bernardino County	2006	14	6th–12th	Glenda Martin Robinson & Traci Burnett	Matthew Douglas

ABOUT THE NETWORK FOR A HEALTHY CALIFORNIA

The mission of the *Network* is to create innovative partnerships that empower low-income Californians to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, and food security with the goal of preventing obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases.

Since 1997, the *Network* has led a growing statewide movement of local, state, and national partners collectively working toward improving the health status of 7 million low-income California parents and children. Multiple venues are used to facilitate

behavior change in homes, schools, worksites, and communities to create environments that support fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity.

With support from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the *Network* funds nearly 150 public and non-profit agencies. USDA requires that *Network* programs and funding target only SNAP recipients and those with similar low incomes.

What is the Youth Engagement Initiative?

The *Network* launched the Youth Engagement Initiative (YEI) in October 2006 as part of the overall goal to increase consumption of the recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables and participation in daily physical activity among low-income families. During the pilot year, six youth engagement sites throughout California worked with low-resource, middle and high school youth (ages 12-18) to conduct a youth-led participatory action research (PAR) project. The projects provide youth with the opportunity to engage in leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, service learning, and strategizing skills to address and promote nutrition and/or physical activity issues. Since its inception, the YEI has expanded to 20 local project sites.

Empower youth to create community change such as installing hydration stations to provide clean drinking water, or making healthy food choices the easy choice in schools.

- Youth initiate project ideas, carry out planning, and goal setting.
- Youth drive the process and are involved in all stages of decision-making.
- Youth teach other youth.

Local projects utilize a youth-led PAR framework. PAR is an inquiry process that includes critical thinking, information gathering, analysis and logical problem solving while building networks and strengthening authentic voice to address issues that contribute to childhood obesity. The steps taken are:

1. Identify the issue or problem of greatest interest and relevance to the youth team.
2. Define what is known about that issue or problem.
3. Identify what additional information is needed to understand the issue.
4. Determine what methods and approach will be used to collect information and then work together as a team to accomplish this.
5. Use the information for education, understanding, strategic action, and/or community change.

Because community conditions, relationships, and players vary, no two PAR projects will look the same. However, by emphasizing work within marginalized

THEORY, METHODS, AND FRAMEWORKS

The desire to engage youth at the center of this initiative is based on evidence from a wide variety of social learning, health promotion, popular education, and youth development theories. In this context, a “youth-led” approach is grounded in the following key principles.¹

- Youth opinions are solicited, respected, and applied.
- Youth identify their own issues, problems, and possible solutions.



communities, this approach seeks to address the underlying causes of inequality while also finding solutions to specific community concerns.²

This is especially relevant when seeking to improve population health, because though overall mortality rates declined and life expectancy rose in the United States during the 20th century, our country nonetheless faces an increasing level of inequity in the health status and mortality of those with less material resources, particularly in communities of color.³ In California, one in every nine children, one in every three teens and over half of adults are overweight or obese. While this epidemic affects nearly all people, the rates are highest among Californians of Latino, American-Indian, African American, and Pacific Islander descent, Californians from lower-income households, and those with disabilities.⁴

Though people often think that health is about individual behavior and lifestyles, health care or developments in medical research, these represent only a small part of the strategies needed to eliminate health disparities. Instead, major advances in health status historically have resulted from broad social reforms such as labor laws that govern workplace health and safety,⁵ increases in the standard of living and improved sanitation, housing, and food safety. Health professionals, policy makers, academics, and advocates increasingly acknowledge that societal conditions play a primary role in determining people's health status, and the inequitable differences for some groups.

Obesity rates and the associated health consequences also are subject to societal forces and policy choices that shape our environment. Neighborhoods offer an abundance of cheap, low-nutrient, high calorie food but limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Research shows that rural, low-income, and minority communities generally have less access to supermarkets. Children are less likely to walk or bike to school due to distance, crime or traffic danger while unsafe parks and streets limit outdoor, active play.⁶

INITIAL HOPES AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The goal of the YEI was to demonstrate that Youth-led PAR is a viable approach to empowering young people and achieving environmental changes that impact health and nutrition.

The initial hopes of most local project staff interviewed for this report can be summarized into two primary desires:

1. Foster peer leadership and educate youth about nutritious and active lifestyles.
2. Empower youth to create community change such as installing hydration stations to provide clean drinking water, or making healthy food choices the easy choice in schools.

Who Participates?

Network-funded projects are eligible to participate in YEI. Though primarily schools, they also include health departments, parks and recreation departments and non profits. Each site is responsible for recruiting an adult ally and a youth team to carry out the scope of work.

STAFFING THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Each local project site is staffed by a project coordinator, adult ally, and a team of youth.

At the State level, one part-time staff manages the program and provides technical assistance. *Network* leaders and a part-time administrative assistant also support the YEI.

The project coordinator has less direct involvement with the youth. They usually are responsible for coordinating multiple aspects of nutrition education, recruiting and coaching adult allies, completing paperwork, connecting the youth team with other community resources, troubleshooting unexpected challenges, and maintaining a vision for the effort. An ongoing responsibility is ensuring the project remains youth-led, adheres to youth development principles, and stays within the parameters of *Network* funding requirements. Project coordinators regularly meet with adult allies and periodically communicate with *Network* staff to keep the projects on track and help problem-solve.

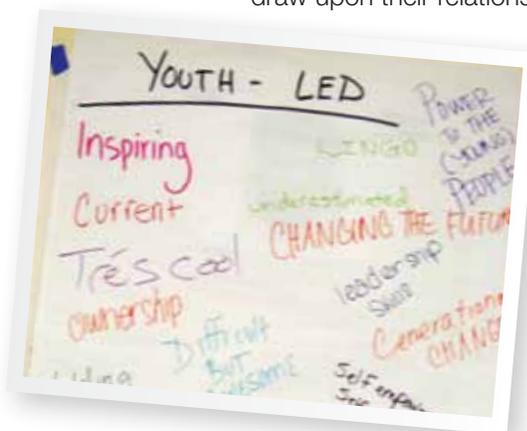
The primary role of the adult ally is to mentor, coach and facilitate the youth team. They are tasked with engaging young people in activities that enable them to discuss and understand issues related to food systems, nutrition and physical activity, select a focus area, research method and question, make meaning of the results, and develop an action plan to advocate for change. Often they are called upon to help smooth the way by coaching students on how to approach adults without putting them on the defensive or blindsiding them with complaints. They draw upon their relationships with school personnel to

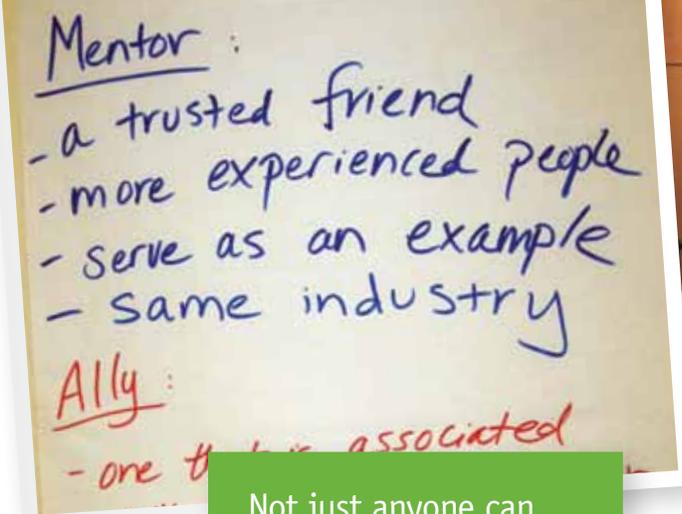
gain in-kind support such as classroom meeting space, use of school vans for transportation, and assistance with distributing surveys.

Not just anyone can be an effective adult ally. In addition to their skills in working with youth, adult allies possess qualities such as a big heart, caring,

commitment, a willingness to “go the extra mile,” and the capacity to let go. They are adults who view young people as assets to their communities. Several describe this as a natural ability to connect with young people. Other qualities include an outgoing personality, charisma, passion, and enthusiasm.

Because results and activities can vary depending on the skill level and interests of the adult allies, selecting the “right” adult ally is an important factor in project success. “There are certain people who just automatically connect with kids. They enjoy it, it’s not





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even work to them, it just comes naturally and they don't have to force it,” explains Traci Burnett, coordinator of adult allies at the San Bernardino Parks and Recreation Department.

Other project coordinators also advise to choose the adult ally well. Adult allies come from a wide variety of professional backgrounds such as public health nursing, history or science education, youth development and film production, among others. Some are parents and have experience with afterschool programs, coaching, or leading youth groups such as 4-H clubs or Girl Scouts. Skills such as meeting facilitation, knowledge of nutrition education, and connections to other community groups also are desirable. Adult allies with skills to navigate school and government bureaucracies are especially advantageous. They can translate complicated policies and procedures to the students as well as negotiate with system administrators on behalf of the youth.

One project coordinator believes it is important to select an adult ally who is comfortable with cultural and demographic differences including ethnicity, age, and income. Adult allies who have personal experience with being marginalized may more easily identify with the youth, see them as equals and therefore, have more successful working relationships. In contrast, adults who bring a more privileged perspective and view the youth as poor and

disadvantaged may unintentionally cause tension. One adult ally explains, “I was also a disaffected youth. It allowed me to see the youth as powerful people who need to learn skills, not as people I need to boost.”

So what motivates an already busy professional to take on a potentially time-consuming, challenging project with youth? Often, YEI goals and principles are compatible with their existing job or organizational mission. In addition,

the project offers something fun and a new way to connect with young people.

Several local project staff say that the YEI is one of their favorite aspects of their job. “If I could just work full-time with youth I'd be happy as a clam. It's my favorite objective in the whole scope of work,” says project coordinator, Deborah Kravitz. Several adults described the desire to make a bigger impact not only on youth, but in the wider community. “I wanted to help the whole community become more nutritious conscious,” says Manuel Ramirez, adult ally at Mountain View Middle School.

Why Engage Youth?

The youth themselves are a primary reason why adults have such a positive experience working in this initiative. Young people bring a different perspective and a fresh approach. They're creative, innovative, technologically savvy, fearless, and energetic. They are unafraid to question the status quo. Most importantly, when youth speak, people listen.

The power of youth voice often is underestimated. Given the opportunity, support, and a platform, young people are able to impact their communities in powerful ways. Adults involved with YEI repeatedly described the power of youth voice to affect not only their peers, but adults and the wider community. They have influenced eating and physical activity habits, school health policies, and the built environment. "The freshness that youth bring if they are helped to be articulate can be very refreshing. They see the world in a different way and it can remind you of your own optimism and that you really can change the world." says Sue Foerster, *Network for a Healthy California*.

Young people are a tremendous resource. When they make a presentation, people listen differently than they might to a teacher or parent. This seems especially true for their peers, who may be more willing to listen to health messages, try new foods or engage in physical activities if the ideas are presented by people closer to their own age. "The students reach out to their peers and relate to them in a different way than I can as an adult," says adult ally, Marianne Hutchins. "It's very powerful."

Once engaged in learning and problem solving, given a chance to be "at the table" and lead, young people can actively shape their communities. Though their experience with systems, institutions, paperwork, and process is limited, this can actually be of benefit. Their imagination, innocence, optimism, and vibrancy are just a few of the unique qualities that allow young people to apply a "fresh lens" to creating solutions. Free-spirited and less encumbered by responsibilities than adults, youth are in a unique position to be authentic ambassadors for obesity prevention programs.

The young participants in this initiative also experience the consequences of environments that all too often don't support healthy choices. Neighborhoods that lack grocery stores but offer plenty of fast food, mobile vendors and liquor stores; unsafe streets, parks and walking trails; bike lanes and sidewalks that are non-existent or in disrepair – all contribute to obesity, diabetes, and other health problems that increasingly impact youth.

"Youth have so much potential; they're the next generation. They appeal to policy makers and are old enough to articulate, debate, and frame the issues."

Valerie Quinn,
Network for a Healthy California

RECRUITING YOUTH

Opinions about the best age at which to engage youth vary considerably among local project staff interviewed for this report. Some maintain that teens in middle school are easier to work with because they appreciate structure and are less distracted by the desire to simply hang out and socialize with friends. Others prefer working with high school age youth because they are more mature and need less guidance.



Whatever their age, interested young people typically are found through existing youth groups, announcements in a school's daily bulletins or recommendations from classroom teachers. Most sites have some type of application process for prospective team members. Acceptance is often based on interest and responses to an interview or essay – some look for youth who “want to do something.” Others keep an open door approach and accept any youth who want to participate. Some local sites advise recruiting a diverse group of youth so that young people learn to appreciate different viewpoints and are able to break free of their usual cliques.

While some sites strive to maintain consistent membership on the youth research teams there is variation in approach. At Mountain View Middle School, an equal number of seventh- and eighth-graders are accepted onto the team each year. This allows continuity from the remaining students when the eighth-graders graduate. Students are required to write an essay on nutrition, which is evaluated by a three-person adult team. At Orange High School, adults targeted freshman and committed to working with them for four years. Students on this team were all at the same grade level so adults didn't have to worry about losing people at different times.

The Del Norte site allows youth to join the project at any time in the process. They set criteria that must be met in order to receive a financial incentive, which is based on a percentage of meetings

“They're using their own voice and talents to get the work done in a way that makes sense so the end product is relevant.”

Kamaljeet Khaira,
Network for a Healthy California

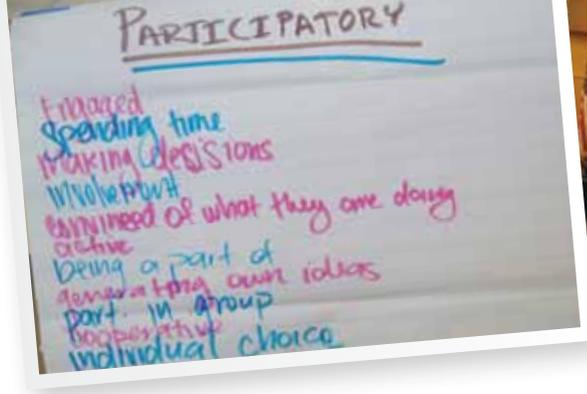
attended. Deborah Kravitz, project coordinator in Del Norte County, explains, “Some kids come once to a meeting and then don't come back so I really don't have to worry about them being there for the wrong reason. Even if they're there for the compensation, they've been there every week, so they've earned it.”

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, TRAINING, AND OTHER SUPPORT

Project sites almost unanimously identify three primary supports that are most effective in implementing the YEI: the *Network's* annual training and binder materials created by Youth in Focus, the *Network's* technical assistance provided by Youth Initiatives Staff, and local community support.

The *Network's* technical assistance, which is provided by one part-time staff person, is commonly described as “invaluable” and “indispensable.” Regular e-mails, check-in phone calls, and site visits are the foundation of technical support, supplemented by webinars to complete the offerings. The *Network* staff for this initiative prioritizes time in the field. Some adult allies report that these local site visits make a positive impression on the youth leaders, because it shows that their opinions and activities are highly valued.

Each year, the *Network* sponsors a training workshop for project coordinators and adult allies. Using simulated exercises, participants practice the activities through role-plays and experience the curriculum as if they were the youth. The activities, templates, and materials “make sense” and are “designed to



get you organized,” says one project coordinator. In addition to teambuilding activities and processes to undertake community research, the binder also includes information for planning and launching the project locally, such as materials to set up meetings with school district personnel, approach partners, and recruit students.

The “Ideal Versus Real” activity is one especially effective part of the resources, identified by several adult allies. Students are guided through discussion about what a healthy school or community might look like if nutritious food and physical activity were abundant and compare that to their actual (real) circumstances. As a result of this exercise, youth discuss what changes are needed in their communities or school and identify who has the power to make decisions about these changes.

Community mapping is another effective activity mentioned by almost all project sites. Youth learn how to use mapping as part of the research process and begin to assess available food, recreation opportunities, and other elements of the community that impact nutrition and physical activity. From these maps, youth identify issues in their school or community related to nutrition, physical activity, and the built environment.

Other training materials include guidelines for developing research questions and methods, sample surveys and interview guides, instruction on how to create a photovoice presentation, exercises to analyze and make meaning of the data, tips for preparing presentations, and sample forms for recruiting youth researchers. This comprehensive training appears

“The training in Sacramento was invaluable. It gave me the framework to let the kids shine.”

Patty Maize, adult ally
Orange High School

to have accomplished its goal of preparing adults to facilitate local projects. “When we left the training, we had everything we needed,” says one project coordinator. “The process just flowed from introduction all the

way to developing a tool to the actual research and analysis,” says another.

YEI training has changed in format over the years. Training is offered on an annual basis rather than staggered throughout the year. “Veteran” participants attend a separate session to brainstorm and problem-solve together. Several of those interviewed say that these opportunities to share what works and how to overcome challenges provide new ideas and encouragement to move forward. Project coordinator Colleen Ogle says, “It’s more than networking, it’s more like corporate brainstorming. I’m so embedded that I can’t think of other approaches. When I talk to other people, I get ideas that I haven’t tried before.”

Local support from school administrators, teachers, and community partners cannot be underestimated as an essential element for success. Adult allies who can navigate the school system, principals who offer youth additional incentives and approve release time, food service staff who meet with youth and support changes to school menus, teachers who lend classrooms and allow students class time to complete surveys are all examples of how local support can help youth attain project goals. Administrators can ensure that the principles of a youth-led effort are adhered to while local project staff help keep lines of communication open by sharing the youth researchers’ progress at staff meetings. In-kind financial assistance to cover food and transportation costs help as well.

Impacts of Youth Research Projects

Each of the sites interviewed for this report identified multiple impacts related to the YEI. Changes and outcomes resulting from the youth research projects generally fall into the following categories:

- Eating and physical activity behavior changes among youth, their peers, and families.
- School and community changes that increase the availability of fruit, vegetables, and clean drinking water.
- Students acquire new skills and exposure to new experiences.
- Successful projects expand to include more sites, new partners, receive additional funding, media attention, and other health improvement efforts.

A “RIPPLE EFFECT” OF CHANGE IN EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BEHAVIORS

Staff from the local sites observed changes in the eating habits of students that participate in YEI. Five sites also report that the youth work has influenced the eating and physical activity habits of their peers, family members, and the wider community. Students were observed eating healthier snacks such as fruit and trail mix, drinking water instead of soda or juice, and consuming more salads and vegetables.

Most of the projects incorporate other nutrition education programs such as *Harvest of the Month*, and several adults report that students are more willing to try new foods. Additionally, a few project staff report that the effects of nutrition education are becoming visible in middle and high school students. They say that youth exposed to nutrition education programs earlier in their education may be more likely to engage in YEI and sustain changes in their eating and physical activity habits.

The willingness to try new foods or engage in physical activity is enhanced when young people observe their peers experimenting and having fun. Several adults described this as a “ripple effect” or “tipping point.” For example, Matt Douglas, adult ally at the San Bernardino Parks and Recreation Department, explains, “Other kids see our youth leaders involved and active, and decide that they would like to become involved and join in. It’s kind of like the domino effect. If one person does it, then others will too.”

Adult ally, Leah Mowery observes a similar trend with the “Fresh Crew” in the Bay Area. Some of the youth who also were involved in drama wanted to have salad for an afterschool snack. They took the initiative and put it together. She says, “Other students saw the salad, got excited, and ate it all up. That would not have happened two years ago. Students are a lot more open to trying new things and actually eating things that have vegetables. I think it has a lot to do with student promotion. They see their own peers offering healthy foods and so they are more trusting. They try it, kind of like it, and then they’re more trusting the next time around. Overall there is more openness and enthusiasm. We wouldn’t have seen that before.”

Johanna Dantzman, adult ally and teacher at Del Norte High School concurs. She says, “Kids know that drinking water is important more than ever. They are making better choices nutritionally because of the [SNAP-Ed] funding that exposes them to fruits and vegetables. Once a month when they get fruits and vegetables, like persimmons; some have never seen it before, but they try it. If it’s there, they’ll try it.”

Adult ally, Manuel Ramirez reports a similar story. “It’s surprising that in our area most of the students





had never tasted persimmons. So we brought in two different types of persimmons, did a lesson, and provided a healthy version of persimmon cookies. Students in the high school come back and ask when we're going to make another batch. So, introduce them to foods they don't normally get, especially with the Hispanic diet."

Staff at the San Bernardino and Lamont project sites report that students also influenced their families' behavior. For example, parents make changes to food purchases and preparation after participating in nutrition education and receiving recipes. Project coordinator, Yolanda Ramirez says, "Every team at the end of the year, you can tell that they've made changes and their families made changes. They say we watch what we buy, we go out and play more together and walk more." One prominent example is that youth in Lamont encouraged their families to participate in the South Kern Building Healthy Communities 100-Day Challenge, which is part of a ten-year health improvement initiative funded by The California Endowment.

Changes in Physical Activity

Changes in physical activity habits appear to be less frequent than nutritional change but some youth teams are making progress. For example, the Fresh Crew from San Leandro High School, learned through their survey research that biking to school was not likely to be a popular option because the majority of students did not own bicycles. However, students were more receptive to walking so they hosted a "Walk to School" Day to promote healthy transportation alternatives.

Youth from San Bernardino and Lamont participated in challenges to complete "virtual walks." They determine how many steps are needed to complete a mile, and how many miles each student must walk in order to reach their desired destination. Youth in Lamont walked the entire length of the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to California while San Bernardino youth walked from their city to Universal Studios and back. In addition to walking, students learn and apply new skills in using pedometers, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and Excel spreadsheets.

In San Bernardino, youth calculated a total of 68 miles for each student and walk around the Community Center three times a week to accumulate miles. Some were so enthusiastic they extended their trip all the way to New York City. The enthusiasm appears to be contagious. Other youth who are not part of the research team often join in the weekly walks. Some of the youth are developing a brochure to ensure that people in the community are informed about affordable physical activities.

One of the original pilot sites in San Bernardino engaged the Westside Steppers Drill Team and Drum Squad, an existing youth group devoted to healthy activities to help keep kids "off the streets." They combined their focus on physical activity with nutrition education, health promotion and research, which resulted in a novel approach to regional sport competitions and State-wide recognition of their work.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CHANGES

Changes to a school or community environment appear to be some of the most challenging for student researchers to achieve. Whether it's changing school menus and cafeterias, or improving parks and streets,



“It’s surprising that in our area most of the students had never tasted persimmons.”

Manuel Ramirez, adult ally
Mountain View Middle School

these goals can take years to come to fruition. This requires a great deal of perseverance on the part of both youth and adults. However, these types of changes extend the reach of the YEI by potentially impacting an entire school or community.

Students enrolled in alternative education in Orange County are investigating the food environment around their “school,” which is located in an otherwise empty storefront. By identifying external eating cues, examining food access and talking with neighborhood leaders, they are developing recommendations for more affordable, healthy food options.

In Lamont, Stay Alive, Stay Healthy (SASH) youth helped establish a food pantry in their community. Each month they do a community service rotation there. They also created a photovoice presentation to highlight community conditions that make physical activity more challenging. As a result, Kern County roads engineers worked with them to improve streets, sidewalks, and trails in their area.

School Cafeteria Upgrades and Menu Changes

Three sites, including two original pilot projects, report that the youth research teams have initiated changes in school cafeterias and menus. Overall, this has resulted in an increase in the availability of fruits and vegetables, healthy snacks, culturally diverse foods, and water.

By opening a dialogue with food services staff, youth at Tennyson High School in Alameda County were able to see some of their suggestions implemented. For example, this pilot site’s cafeteria now offers

a diversified menu along with satellite stations that are located throughout the school and offer healthy options.

At another pilot site, the student research project resulted in a

completely remodeled cafeteria. Officials at Orange High School named the cafeteria “Lunch Bunch Café” in their honor. In addition, healthy vending machines were installed due to the student’s research project and action.

At Zane Middle School in Humboldt County, one outcome of the student work is that the school now offers a second breakfast during the morning break. Adult ally Marianne Hutchins says that although this was a different outcome than what students were working toward, it represents an important change. By raising awareness of nutrition and food access issues, administrators became more aware that many students reported being hungry by third period. Students often went without breakfast or were eating foods without a lot of nutritional value. Other students experienced “basic food insecurity” at home.

Hydration Stations Increase Access to Clean Drinking Water

Youth in two communities in Northern California decided to investigate the issue of access to clean drinking water in school. In both cases, students discovered water fountains in disrepair and problems with water quality. Due to the students’ efforts, Zane Middle School became the first public school in Humboldt County to install a hydration station so that students have access to affordable, clean drinking water. Students at Del Norte High School also are advocating for this solution.



Youth Inspire Changes in Foods Offered at School and Community Events

Raising awareness of healthy, nutritious options is a focus for many of the youth research teams. During school and community events such as an annual chili cook-off, sports team competitions, health fairs, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, and Earth week, youth offer taste tests in combination with *Harvest of the Month* or other *Network*-funded nutrition education activities.

YOUTH LEARN VALUABLE SKILLS, GAIN EXPOSURE TO NEW EXPERIENCES, AND RECEIVE RECOGNITION

All of the sites interviewed for this report say that youth learn valuable skills as a result of YEI participation. Moreover, they gain exposure to new experiences that they otherwise would not have access to in their low-resource communities. From trying new foods to engaging in community service, this initiative provides a variety of “first time” opportunities for youth participants. For example, it may be the first time they’ve undertaken research, delivered a public presentation, served their community, tasted persimmons, or been listened to and asked their opinion. Leaving their neighborhood to make a presentation, attend a conference or take a field trip to observe how other places implement solutions can be a life changing experience for youth participants.

In fact, some adults believe the skill development and exposure to new experiences are some of the most important aspects of the research projects. “It gets kids educated on healthy living and helps them prepare for college, a job and life,” says adult ally, Matt Douglas. Adults repeatedly say that youth respond positively to this initiative because they learn that “they can make a difference,” “be part of something bigger,”

and “have an impact.” Project coordinator, Chris Boynton says this sense of empowerment is “huge for a student in an underperforming school. It’s the first time anyone’s ever asked their opinion and said to them, ‘You know your environment and you’re the expert, tell us what you want.’ To act and be well-supported is so powerful.”

Adults identified a variety of new skills and knowledge acquired by youth and applied to healthy eating and active living issues including:

- Public speaking, report writing, and grammar
- Preparing presentations using PowerPoint and photovoice
- Research methods, survey design, and data analysis
- GIS technology and community mapping
- Video production (VideoVoice) and developing public service announcements
- Community outreach
- Event planning
- Relationship and teambuilding skills such as diplomacy, listening, and cooperation
- Goal setting, prioritizing, and developing an action plan
- Navigating bureaucracies
- Cooking, gardening, and preparing healthy snacks; better understanding of nutrition, food preparation, and food systems.
- Better understanding of the importance of regular physical activity



Participation allows youth to develop leadership capacity and confidence that can contribute to their future success.

Some youth researchers are involved in providing nutrition education to peers, younger students or the community-at-large. For example, SASH participants in Lamont lead groups of adults in physical activity exercises and present information on *Harvest of the Month* for families that access the food pantry. Through their participation, youth can overcome their fear of public speaking. “That’s what they’re most afraid of,” reports one project coordinator. They say, “I had to stand up in front of my friends to talk about what they should and shouldn’t eat. I was terrified.” But afterwards, when their friends approach them to ask questions, the students understand the value. A project coordinator reflects, “The most important lesson for me is that getting youth involved is a really good way of making messages go that much further. When the kids speak, you can tell they have 100% attention. Youth have the power to get the attention of adults or other young people.”

Public presentations to adult decision makers are one of the culminating activities that result from the youth research. These events give youth a platform to use their voice and “shine.” Their presentations are often enhanced by photos and videos to emphasize key points. “It’s evident people love listening to the kids when they present,” says one adult ally.

Youth leaders are “presenting all over.” They’ve shared their research results with *Regional Collaboratives*, The California Endowment’s *Building Healthy Communities* groups, administrators, and staff at County Health and Human Services and City Parks and Recreation departments. Some have presented at statewide conferences. For example, at the 2011 California Childhood Obesity Prevention conference in San

Diego, youth from three *Network* sites were featured panelists in breakout sessions. They also met with the U.S. Undersecretary of Agriculture. Project coordinator, Deborah Kravitz says, “They were a hit and put Del Norte County on the map.”

Youth participants have also received recognition for their healthy eating and active living promotion efforts. For example, the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) honored SASH youth researchers at an annual awards dinner for their food pantry work. The Humboldt Health team received an award from the Northcoast Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative for contributions to the *Water Woes* publication.

Participation allows youth to develop leadership capacity and confidence that can contribute to their future success. Several adults report that youth researchers become more involved in other school and community activities, an effect that can outlast their participation in this initiative. A few report that the youth remain active in health promotion and community service even after they leave the program. Clearly, the experience of participating in community change efforts creates the potential for youth to develop into life-long advocates for a healthy lifestyle.

Results also suggest that academic performance may be positively affected. In two cases, all the youth participants attained honor roll status or went on to college, outcomes that adult allies believe were influenced by their YEI participation. In one case, the project coordinator believes the positive impact on youth is gaining notice in the school system and wider community. This in turn creates more support



for the program and its approach. “It’s so accepted because of the change in the kids. All of the kids who participated are on the honor roll. They didn’t start there,” she explains.

PROJECT EXPANSION

As a whole, YEI grew from six pilot sites to more than three times its original size in just four years. There are now over 20 programs throughout California. In some communities, success with one youth engagement project has led to the establishment of others. For example, in San Bernardino, after successfully piloting the initiative at one community center with an existing youth group, the project expanded to include six community centers and any interested youth.

The potential and positive results are gaining notice on a local level and as a result, attracting new partners and resources. As word of the youth projects spreads, young people are recognized as “ambassadors” for a healthy lifestyle and their school. “It really helps with the school’s image,” says one adult ally.

Youth Researchers Partner with The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative

Three YEI communities participate in *Building Healthy Communities (BHC)*, a 10 year place-based health improvement initiative funded by The California

Endowment (TCE). YEI and the *BHC* effort share some similar goals and due to this synergy, project staff and youth in the counties of Del Norte, Kern, and Orange are exploring ways to partner. One benefit to these partnerships is that youth research teams have been

invited to participate in additional trainings, conferences and projects sponsored and funded by *BHC*.

In Del Norte County, staff from TCE and the local *BHC* hub coordinator, The Wild Rivers Foundation, initiated a meeting to learn more about CHANGE.

“They were impressed with the Youth-led Participatory Action Research model,” project coordinator Deborah Kravitz says. “*BHC* uses a similar community building model and the Youth-led

PAR method is a great supplement.” Both approaches engage community members to identify important issues and mobilize action. Several CHANGE youth are active *BHC* members and serve on the youth implementation team. This summer when Del Norte *BHC* hired 30 youth to conduct community mapping throughout the county and adjacent tribal lands, several CHANGE members gained employment.

In the Central Valley, SASH youth participated in the 100-Day Challenge, the local *BHC* kickoff event. Meanwhile, Orange County’s *Network* project coordinator is working with the Santa Ana *BHC* to find ways to partner and to schedule youth from Santiago Creek to present their research findings.

There are now over 20 programs throughout California. In some communities, success with one youth engagement project has led to the establishment of others.

Implementation Challenges

Trying anything new involves some risk, experimentation and challenges. Common challenges experienced by youth engagement sites include the following:

TIME PRESSURE

Time pressure may be one of the most common challenges and was identified by six of the seven local sites. Youth often are active in other afterschool activities, which limits their availability. For example, several sites report that they only are able to meet weekly during 40 minute lunch periods, supplemented by occasional afternoon or weekend sessions. The time it takes to implement activities in the curriculum is more than what some expect. Finally, adult allies and project coordinators usually have other responsibilities so they too may find that making time for the YEI is a stretch. Cuts to schools, parks and health department budgets frequently result in staff taking on additional job duties, which leaves less time for participating in optional activities like the YEI.

GAINING ADULT BUY-IN

While YEI emphasizes the principle of being “youth-led”, this doesn’t mean adult support isn’t needed. In fact, it’s essential whether it’s recruiting adult allies, asking teachers to use classroom time to conduct surveys or convincing school district administrators to approve a field trip. Yet, gaining buy-in from adult leaders presents a variety of challenges.

Within schools, while health and nutrition are important, administrators may need to prioritize activities that they believe more directly link to academic success. “The focus is on bringing up test scores, academics and curriculum rather than special

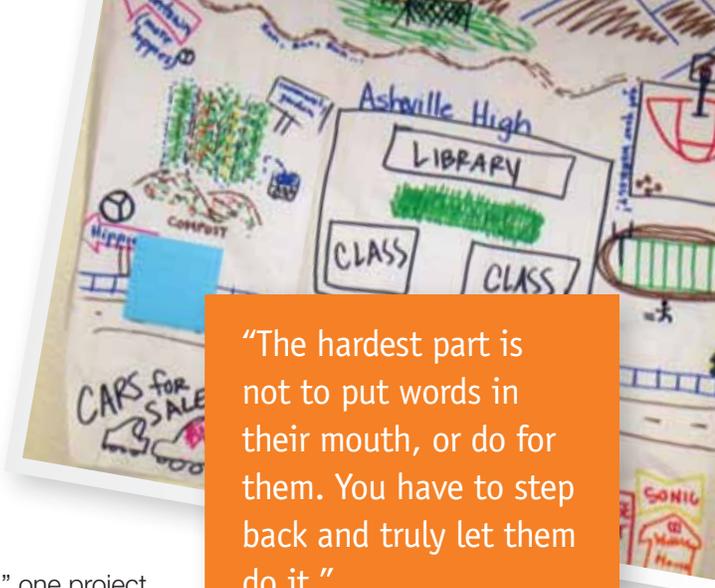
projects,” one project coordinator explains.

Some teachers continue to offer snacks that are high in fat and sugar

as incentives and rewards. Donuts, cookies, hot chocolate, and hot dogs are among the foods cited as enticements. Several sites report that these types of foods are still routinely offered at school events and continue to be sold at school fundraisers. At one school district, junior high students report that some elementary school teachers withhold recess or physical education as a disciplinary technique.

Convincing adults that a youth-led effort is a valuable and viable approach can itself be a challenge. Adults have their own ideas about effective strategies and find it difficult to resist imposing these. “Some have a reticence to give control to the youth,” says one project coordinator. Others may not understand the underlying principles of a youth-led approach. “You’ve got to let them go. It’s going to be messy, they won’t always get it right, and it won’t be linear,” explains one project coordinator.

One local site discovered this after the youth designed and distributed a survey that one teacher took exception to. A misunderstanding of both the intent of the survey and YEI resulted in the teacher’s refusal to distribute the survey and ultimately affected the overall response rate. “We adults would do it differently but that’s not the point,” the project coordinator says. “We’re trying to make sure they take the lead. It’s a group of students motivated to make change and do something different.”



“The hardest part is not to put words in their mouth, or do for them. You have to step back and truly let them do it.”

Patty Maize, adult ally
Orange High School



MAINTAINING MOMENTUM: MOTIVATING PARTICIPATION & ENSURING A YOUTH-LED APPROACH

Several conditions contribute to the challenge of keeping youth enthused. First and foremost, if youth are not trusted and allowed to lead, their participation will wane. Unlike school, YEI participation is not mandated; it's voluntary. Kids get "bored," they encounter

obstacles or projects require more time and work than they realized. Other activities divide their attention; their attention span may be short. They may have challenges at home or conflicts with siblings or friends who are also involved. The project doesn't seem "cool." Sometimes they don't really have much interest at the start – their "hearts are not really in it" and they "don't take ownership." From year-to-year, young people change schools, graduate or move out of the neighborhood. Undocumented youth face unique challenges that limit their ability to receive compensation or travel. For all these reasons and more, adult allies and project coordinators say it can be challenging to keep youth engaged.

Challenges at home can influence youth's motivation and ability to participate. While nutrition and physical activity are important concerns, they may not always be the priority. Project coordinator Glenda Martin Robinson explains, "Some of the kids participating last winter lost their home and we would see them really cold, sitting outside and coming into the center to stay warm." Several other project staff note that youth from low-income families sometimes go without food. Additionally, transportation costs for bus passes or gas for the family car can become a barrier.

"It's hard not to say anything. You want the kids to come to the conclusion on their own; not me telling them what the conclusion should be. Adults need to guide them but not make the decisions for them. Let the students do it because when they own it, they'll believe in it."

Johanna Dantzman, adult ally
Del Norte High School

The process of change takes time and the slow pace may discourage young people. Project coordinator Deborah Kravitz is proud of the CHANGE students for sticking with the two year process to address clean drinking water. "Change takes time. Things take longer and you have to be patient," she says. Adult ally Johanna Dantzman emphasizes that understanding the process of change is an important

skill the students learn through their work. "You can't sustain change unless others see a problem too. If you just go and do something, then people aren't on board. They don't understand the issues. The concerns are not relevant."

So what helps counter these conditions and keep youth engaged? Incentives, making it fun and worthwhile, an adult ally who "gets it" and empowering youth to lead are a few effective strategies. One project coordinator explains, "They don't like to be told what to do. They're more likely to participate if they have a say. They need to feel important." The idea of doing something that can make a difference is powerful motivation. Reframing how youth see themselves also may shift their perspective of their own importance and increase buy-in.

Allowing youth to lead is both a strategy to maintain participation and a challenge because it may seem easier for adults to do it themselves. This can be especially true if working with middle school youth who are younger and may need more guidance. Ensuring the projects remain youth-led can be a real struggle for adults – especially if they are goal-oriented, time pressured, feeling overwhelmed



or lack training. “The tendency is to lecture, present or step in,” says one project coordinator. “That’s the traditional teaching model.” She says it took a few years for staff to get trained and really understand the purpose. “Building capacity doesn’t happen overnight.”

There is a great deal of agreement that adults need to “let go.” “Adults need to learn to step back and let the youth decide,” says project coordinator Yolanda Ramirez. Project coordinator Chris Boynton also advises, “Until you see the power of it, you’re not sure you can let go. We have parameters from the *Network* but you have to let go. The more you can let them do it, the more they’ll go with it. Allow them to take control.”

STAFF TURNOVER

As difficult as it is to contend with inconsistent participation among youth, maintaining consistent adult leadership can prove equally challenging. Five of the seven sites report challenges with staff turnover, which occurs not only among project staff, but with school personnel as well. Youth and their adult allies may spend a great deal of time building relationships with key school administrators, teachers and food service staff only to realize they need to start all over as positions shift. “This year we discovered there was a new principal, teacher, and front office staff. I didn’t know anybody and they didn’t know me,” says one adult ally.

“Getting any change to the school district is really challenging,” says another adult ally. Staff turnover makes it more so. Retirements and budget cuts are commonly cited reasons for the staff shuffle. When people leave their jobs, they often are not replaced. Job responsibilities are reassigned, sometimes to people who are already overwhelmed by other tasks.

The consequences of staff turnover are multiple. Background, history, and forward momentum are lost. New staff requires training. Time is needed to build relationships and understand the process. When adult allies leave, that also creates challenges for keeping youth engaged. “At one site, we’ve had three different adult allies due to a maternity leave, hiring delays, and budget cuts,” the *Network’s* Youth Initiatives Consultant Kamaljeet Khaira says. “In one case, the adult came to the training and then left his job a few weeks later. The youth team didn’t have an adult to work with them.”

NAVIGATING BUREAUCRACY

There is a long line of agencies involved in administering funding and decisions that govern young people’s access to nutritious food and safe places to exercise. “It’s a process of working with nested bureaucracies to get something done,” explains one project coordinator. From the layers of the USDA at the federal level to the California Department of Public Health, funds eventually make their way to the local level and typically pass through the County Office of Education, to a school district or health department, and then to a school site. Learning how to navigate bureaucracy is a skill necessary for all participants in this initiative.

Some adult allies described challenges associated with understanding how the school system works. At times, simply making a request to partner with students from other classes requires this know-how as does gaining permission for student release time from class, distributing surveys, hosting school nutrition education events or taking a field trip.



EVALUATING AND SHARING PROGRESS

At the end of each year, youth research teams write a final report or create a presentation to summarize their project process and outcomes. The *Network* periodically conducts other types of evaluation activities, such as surveys, key informant interviews, and training assessments. Several adults interviewed expressed interest in collecting more information from youth participants, teachers and other involved adults.

Evaluating how changes occur on an individual and community level can be complicated. “Sometimes these things are so hard to measure; it’s hard to know what other things helped to cause the domino effect,” an adult ally explains. Like other YEI activities, program evaluation provides an opportunity to engage young people.

Next year, Project EAT hopes to initiate evaluation activities that can help determine YEI’s “reach” by examining students’ social networks. The design involves asking youth to identify five other people they think they’ve affected through their nutrition education projects. They plan to contact those individuals to determine project impact, and if possible, continue to identify other students who may have been affected by the project. Part of the goal is to develop a better understanding of how the nutrition education messages and behavior change spread. “You don’t know the connections until you start to ask,” explains project coordinator Chris Boynton.

Another area that may be interesting to explore is the long-term effect of nutrition education programs offered in elementary school or middle school. Some evidence appears to indicate that these early experiences have far-reaching impact on students’ continuing involvement with health promotion activities

and sustained changes in health habits. For example, adult ally Patty Maize recalls that when recruiting for the youth research team, “Some of the Lunch Bunch had been involved in grade school with nutrition education. They remembered it and it made them want to participate.”

Adult ally Manuel Ramirez also observed changes among high school youth who participated in Mountain View Middle School’s youth research team. He says, “Putting nutrition into the minds of kids this age make them advocates for nutrition and will yield huge dividends in the future. Making them conscious at a very young age really did work. I see kids at the high school and it’s really affected their eating and health habits....In high school, they remain active in community and youth groups.”

Evaluating how YEI partnerships are established and contribute to change also presents a rich opportunity for research. Currently, partnership building may primarily occur during a back-and-forth process between the adult allies, youth research team, and prospective partners. The interests of the youth are communicated to others within the adult allies’ professional network, perhaps through a casual conversation over lunch or within a more formal setting like the *Network* Regional Collaboratives.

“Putting nutrition into the minds of kids this age, make them advocates for nutrition and will yield huge dividends in the future. Making them conscious at a very young age really did work. I see kids at the high school and it’s really affected their eating and health habits....In high school, they remain active in community and youth groups.”

Manuel Ramirez, adult ally
Mountain View Middle School



These discussions may result in some kind of connection, opportunity or idea that the adult ally then brings back to the youth team. The youth then decide how to move forward.

One project coordinator explains that in this approach, “the adult ally provides opportunities for the kids to connect with other groups.” She speculates that adult allies who are successful social connectors also will have more successful action research projects. While this presents a compelling research question for the future, there also is potential for investigating how to shift that role to the youth. “The important social node is the adult ally. How do we move from the adult ally being that connecting node to the kids being the connecting node?”

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CHALLENGES

While participants almost unanimously praise the Youth Engagement Program, some identified a few challenges. Most often, finding the time to implement the activities is the biggest hurdle. A few also report that more training time is needed. Because the training has been consolidated over the years, it feels more like “a refresher course rather than a full training,” says one project coordinator. Our newer sites will require more technical assistance and support, as our veteran sites can serve as mentor sites to these newer sites.

Some adults who are unable to attend training until months after they’ve begun their projects, due to scheduling conflicts, appear to encounter challenges implementing the YEI. They may be unaware of the activities available to support their efforts or of content issues such as how the built environment can influence food choices and physical activity.

One year, early in the initiative, teams from all the pilot sites attended a Youth Forum in Sacramento. Several adults report that this experience had a positive impact on both adults and young people and provided youth an opportunity to meet with their peers from around the State to learn and strategize together. Currently, opportunities for both adults and youth to connect with each other in person, to share successes, and lessons learned are limited. Several participants interviewed expressed interest in participating in more shared learning opportunities.

In a few cases, staff or youth may find the program a bit overwhelming or lacking some content. For example, some youth who participate at their local community center say the activities feel too much like school. So the adults have found ways to present the curriculum differently. Rather than engaging youth in the activities classroom style, they talk and walk. At another site, adults and youth needed more step-by-step instructions to transition from research to action. To solve this dilemma, they found other resources such as a *Network*-approved training conference that youth could attend. Adults from two sites report that more nutrition education materials appropriate to the high school level are needed.

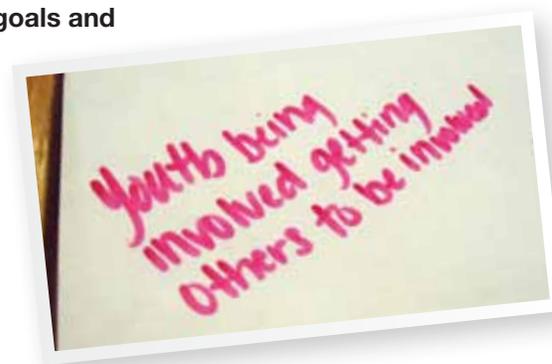
A few sites also indicate that there is a “readiness” factor to consider when implementing the curriculum with youth. It can be challenging to engage youth in research if they first do not have basic information about nutrition, food systems, and the built environment. One site addressed this issue by dividing the project into two phases. The first year students learn about nutrition, gardening and how to prepare recipes. Once they have acquired this basic knowledge, they are better prepared for action research.



Advice from the Field

This “top ten” list is a compilation of advice adult project staff have for anyone interested in launching a Youth-led Participatory Action Research Project.

1. **Choose your adult ally wisely.** Ensure they are passionate about working with youth, trained and supported.
2. **“Let go” to keep the project youth-led.** Adults need to provide guidance rather than making decisions for youth.
3. **Offer youth incentives to participate.** In addition to compensation, special rewards or privileges, make it fun and offer the chance to try new, healthy foods.
4. **Recruit a diverse group of youth who are interested in health and community improvement.** Make sure they want to be there and understand the commitment.
5. **Devote time for both adults and youth to participate in regular trainings and unexpected opportunities.**
6. **Work with youth to identify their goals and establish a project timeline.** Share examples and options to help give them ideas about what’s possible.
7. **Establish a positive rapport with school staff, administrators and community partners.** Start project planning early and discuss expectations, logistics, processes and procedures to avoid misunderstandings. Communicate your intentions and be upfront about the goals and principles of the initiative and the changes youth are seeking.
8. **Evaluate as much as possible.** Collect feedback from youth and adults about what worked and what can be improved. Use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.
9. **Share successes within the Network and with the wider community.** Capture and broadcast the stories of youth and community change.
10. **Be patient and stay the course – change takes time.** Follow the process and make time for youth to find their voice, and for decision makers to be ready to listen and respond.



Where to Next? Hopes & Potential Directions for the Future

Most project staff hope that the YEI continues to thrive, grow and receive funding and support. As they envision the future, some hope the projects will be “bigger and better,” involving more youth and community members.

Ultimately, there is the hope that youth continue to contribute to their communities as health advocates whether in high school, college or as adults and that eventually, the issues driving this work will be resolved.

Other ideas for future directions include the following:

- Offer more training and technical support to local sites. For example, establish more opportunities to connect YEI project sites across the initiative to enhance learning and sharing or include more school personnel in training.
 - Provide more opportunities to “blend” or “cross-over” with other *Network* programs and activities, such as *CX³* and *Harvest of the Month*.
 - Encourage youth to take more ownership and leadership of the YEI. For example, train youth to mentor and educate other youth on the “how-to’s” of Youth-led PAR or create avenues for YEI program Alumni to continue their work as health educators and advocates.
 - Explore the use of social networking as tools for youth to educate and activate each other. Conduct evaluation research on the role adult mentors play in establishing social connections on behalf of the youth and how youth can become the central “social node.”
- Standardize the Youth-led PAR approach into schools by working with the California Department of Education to integrate this technique in educational content standards.
 - Partner with compatible organizations to develop toolkits and resources that can be used with other issues and funders.
 - Fund other types of organizations beyond schools to undertake YEI projects.
 - Obtain funding on the local level to further implement action plans.
 - Conduct longitudinal evaluation to better understand long-term effects in schools and communities with student leaders.

“When the project is over, it doesn’t end there. They carry it with them. It can last their entire lives and may influence their choice of college, career path or volunteer activities.”

Marianne Hutchison,
adult ally
Zane Middle School



¹ Adapted from: McCall, Douglas S. and Mary M. Shannon. *Youth Led Health Promotion, Youth Engagement and Youth Participation: A Research Review*. Canadian Association for School Health, June 1999. <http://www.safehealthyschools.org/Youth%20Engagement%20Research%20Review.pdf>

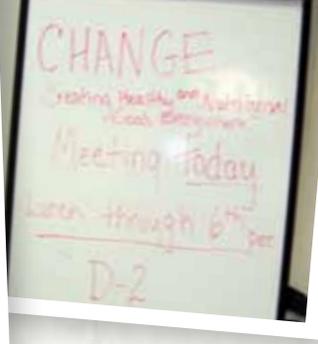
² Brydon-Miller, Mary. “Using Participatory Action Research to Address Community Health Issues.” (Chapter 11) in *Health Psychology Practice*

³ Hofrichter, Richard. *Health and Social Justice*, ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

⁴ *2010 California Obesity Prevention Plan: A Vision for Tomorrow, Strategic Actions for Today*. Sacramento (CA): California Department of Public Health, California Obesity Prevention Program, 2010.

⁵ Hofrichter, Richard. *Health and Social Justice*, ed

⁶ *2010 California Obesity Prevention Plan: A Vision for Tomorrow, Strategic Actions for Today*.



Case Studies

In this next section, we have highlighted youth-led efforts throughout the State, in order to share local stories and demonstrate what young people can accomplish. In some of these examples, youth overcame substantial obstacles and worked together to accomplish their goals.

Recruiting for CHANGE

(Del Norte High School, Del Norte Unified School District)

At the beginning of the school year, students at Del Norte High School applied their creative talents to the task of recruiting more youth to their research team, which is called CHANGE. They created a video that played in all the classrooms. They included metaphors of change and set the video to David Bowie's song "Changes" to invite students to join the CHANGE team.



SASH Inspires Others to Join *Building Healthy Community's* 100-Day Challenge

(Mountain View Middle School, Lamont)

To participate in the South Kern *Building Healthy Communities (BHC)* 100-Day Challenge, each SASH member made a personal commitment to change a health habit for 100 days and encourage their families to join the challenge. Some youth gave up drinking soda or eating chips. Others chose to limit portion sizes, for example consuming 6 ounces of juice daily instead of drinking it all day long. Adult ally Manuel Ramirez observes that this has "made kids more conscious of what they're putting in their bodies."

As a team, they decided to walk 10,000 steps a day. They are mapping their progress to achieve the equivalent of walking the Pacific Coast Trail across California from the Mexican to Oregon borders. They track their steps on a spreadsheet, converting every 2000 steps to 1 mile. Seventeen staff from the Family Resource Center and school district joined SASH in the virtual hike and even the *BHC* program officer got involved!

Each SASH member made a personal commitment to change a health habit for 100 days.

Project EAT's Fresh Crew Sponsors a Walk-to-School Day

(San Lorenzo High School, Alameda County Office of Education)

The Fresh Crew at San Lorenzo High School is comprised of 15 students who participate in two-year, afterschool internships to train in health issues, gardening, and food preparation. In the initial year, interns learn the basics of nutrition and food systems through hands-on activities such as harvesting, composting, and cooking. In year two, they carry out participatory action research projects.

Project EAT staff tailored the program to student needs after they learned that 51% of students were either in charge of the family food purchasing or preparation. This was a 13% rise from the previous year; a jump that they speculate is due to the economic downturn. "Parents work more and therefore, rely more on their older children," explains project coordinator Chris Boynton. "We realized kids are the gatekeepers for nutrition in their households."

This year, the Fresh Crew divided into three issue groups to develop their research questions which focused on how to encourage students to choose healthier food, how to encourage students to walk or bike to school, and how to change food served in the school cafeteria.

The Fresh Crew designed a survey to learn more about student attitudes and behaviors about transportation to school. They thought concerns about safety might prevent students from biking or walking to school. However, youth researchers discovered that perception of distance rather than safety was the key barrier. They also learned that not many students owned bicycles but did report a willingness to walk to school.

So the Fresh Crew decided to host a Walk-to-School day during Earth Week to promote walking as a healthy transportation alternative. They asked English teachers to make announcements in all of their classes and asked students to pledge to participate. They arranged for volunteers to provide juice and snacks at all the entrances to the school. Kaiser Permanente and the Sheriff's Department were among the partners they recruited to donate prizes.

About 300 students signed in to their event that day. The Fresh Crew students had a "great experience out of the whole process," says adult ally Leah Mowery. "They learned a lot about planning an event and reaching out to the community." Next year, the school's Green Academy will coordinate Earth Week activities and the Fresh Crew plans to participate again. Leah is encouraging them to develop a planning toolkit to make it easier to replicate their efforts.

Project EAT staff tailored the program to student needs after they learned that 51% of students were either in charge of the family food purchasing or preparation.





Youth now are investigating people's awareness of free or low-cost physical activities that are available in the community. To ensure the information is distributed, they are developing a brochure.

Stepping Out Childhood Obesity: Westside Steppers Win Award for Their Efforts

(San Bernardino Parks and Recreation)

The City of San Bernardino Parks and Recreation Department operates six different centers, one of which served as an original YEI pilot site. Beginning with an existing group of teens called the Westside Steppers Drill Team and Drum Squad, their original research question centered on how physical inactivity affects African American teens. Program coordinator Glenda Martin Robinson recalls that when the team started to discuss the question they realized, "This is not just an African American thing, it's a people thing." So they broadened the issue and the group by involving another community center that primarily serves a Latino population. Youth now are investigating people's awareness of free or low-cost physical activities that are available in the community. To ensure the information is distributed, they are developing a brochure.

The Westside Steppers have achieved a variety of accomplishments but one stand out is an event called "Stepping Out Childhood Obesity." The youth invited drill teams from around the region to compete and offered water and fresh fruit to every team after they completed their routine. They also offered a food tasting of healthfully prepared collard greens at the concession stand. The greens were prepared without fatback and tasters reported positive feedback. In recognition for their work, the Westside Steppers were selected as gold medalist winners of the Spotlight Award by the California Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports in 2009.



Santiago Creek Youth Explore the Food Environment

(Santa Ana, Orange County Department of Education)

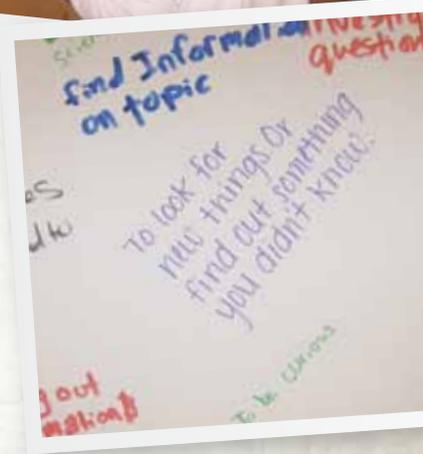
The Santiago Creek Youth Research Team meets weekly to research and learn more about food environments. Their educational program is located in an otherwise empty building; a storefront with blackened windows, situated in what's known as a "food desert." School meals are not offered, so most students bring food from home or rely on what's available in the neighborhood. "Convenience stores and fast food are available more than any other food establishments. This limits their choices and opportunities to eat healthy especially when they take the bus and don't bring something from home. They are identifying that it's not always their choice," says project coordinator Kat Soltanmorad.

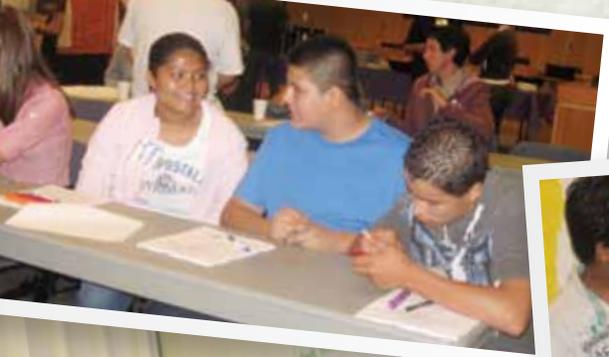
Students decided to focus their research on identifying external eating cues and examining issues such as access to fresh fruit and vegetables, availability of food at grocery stores, nutrient dense foods, and food marketing. Using the USDA-produced guide called Empowering Youth with Nutrition and Physical Activity, students mapped the neighborhood to learn what foods are available and those that are not. With this information, they met with local restaurant owners to discuss ideas for healthier and less expensive menu options.

The students plan to present their findings and recommendations to the City Council and will invite members of the National Restaurant Association to attend. They will present to the Santa Ana Building Healthy Communities collaborative, which is part of a statewide initiative funded by The California Endowment. In addition to their research, students also teach homeless children in elementary school. Using the *Harvest of the Month* tools, they conduct taste testing and lead a physical activity lesson. Partly based on the youth leaders' work, the school received a \$1000 grant from UnitedHealthcare to address childhood obesity in Santa Ana.

Ms. Soltanmorad says that this project is an excellent fit for the students at Santiago Creek and really resonates with them. "The best way to engage young people is with hands-on, direct learning; almost following adult learning principles, especially since the traditional learning was not working with them." Students at this alternative high school have been transient or homeless; others have been expelled for a long period of time. "Giving them this type of responsibility to go out in the real world and apply what they're learning promotes self-esteem and leadership skills," she adds.

Students decided to focus their research on identifying external eating cues and examining issues such as access to fresh fruit and vegetables, availability of food at grocery stores, nutrient dense foods, and food marketing.





Their research focused on how a new policy to close the campus during lunchtime would affect student food choices.

Overachievers Update: Cafeteria Changes

(Tennyson High School, Alameda County Office of Education)

The “Overachievers” were the original youth group at Tennyson High School. Their research focused on how a new policy to close the campus during lunchtime would affect student food choices. About 1600 students lined up daily during one lunch period in a cafeteria built to accommodate 400 students. Due to long lines, there was often not enough food or time to eat. The students approached food services staff with suggestions for improving food options. In response, the school cafeteria diversified their menu and established “satellite stations.” These are “essentially a food cart or a closet that’s converted into a food storage space,” explains project coordinator Chris Boynton. “They serve Chef or Cobb salads in enclosed containers.” This is based on youth research that found high school students don’t like salad bars because they don’t trust their peers to not contaminate the food.

The Lunch Bunch Café: Four Years of Persistence & Perseverance Pays Off

(Orange High School, Orange Unified School District)

Beginning their freshman year, a dozen Orange High School students worked together for four years to obtain healthier food choices at their high school. Because the students were involved in other activities, after school meetings weren’t feasible. So, in honor of their weekly, 40-minute lunch time meetings, they dubbed themselves the Lunch Bunch.

The only Title I high school in the district, 2200 students attend school in a building designed to hold half that number. Lunchtime meant long lines in the cafeteria that had too few serving areas. Student athletes looking for fuel for sports practice after school did not find many healthy options. As the students discussed these issues, they decided to narrow their goal to have healthy food in vending machines. Their next question was, “What if no one buys them?” So the students worked with the food service staff and conducted taste tests. Afterwards, they tallied and reported on the most popular items.

Adult ally Patty Maize recalls that they learned about alternative vending machines from a nearby school district. "In San Diego, they bought all new vending machines, stocked them, and got the profit from them," she explained. So the Lunch Bunch took a field trip to learn how Vista High School had procured healthy vending machines. Because *Network* funding does not allow for transportation costs, the food services department paid the expenses and allowed the Lunch Bunch to use school vans.

After the second year, the school's *Network* funding ended and consequently, students no longer received compensation. "We continued working together even after the funding was gone," Patty says. "That's how committed the kids were." The principal was very supportive and offered students more units and scholarship opportunities based on their work. They spent two years "mostly just trying to move forward and not let it die," says Patty. Students made presentations to the district's nutrition committee and at the annual *Network* conference in Sacramento. They persevered through staff turnover including the project coordinator, principal, three food services managers and the Assistant Superintendent in charge of buildings. Eventually even Patty's position was eliminated due to budget cuts.

Ultimately, Orange High School was the first school in the district to install a healthy vending machine, which Patty says is due to the students' activities. In their senior year, the Lunch Bunch assessed different vendors. "By the time they graduated, we finally got new vending machines." Over the course of the four years, the California state legislature passed laws to regulate food in school vending machines, which Patty says helped the students' cause. But the changes didn't stop there.

Six weeks before the end of their senior year, the new Lunch Bunch Café held its grand opening. Members of the Lunch Bunch signed a banner that hangs over the remodeled cafeteria and kitchen, now painted with bright colors and named in their honor. "The whole cafeteria is upgraded with more fruits and vegetables," says Patty. They commonly run out of salads at the point of service, a sign that this type of food is in demand and students are eating more fruits and vegetables.

"To have kids be in a leadership capacity and see them shine is one of the most important results of this project that Patty has observed. "Everyone knew who the Lunch Bunch was by the time we ended the process." Patty says she's most proud that "They've left a legacy at the school."



Orange High School students worked together for four years to obtain healthier food choices at their high school.



At their presentation to the Health Department, the Humboldt Health students learned about hydration stations, an insert in the wall that dispenses water into refillable bottles using infrared sensors.



Humboldt Health Helps to End “Water Woes” at Zane Middle School

(Zane Middle School, Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services)

In just two years, the Humboldt Health team from Zane Middle School made great strides in raising awareness of student nutrition and physical activity habits. Some of the group focused on increasing access to drinkable water. Last year, they participated in activities to assess drinking water with the Northcoast Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative, the *Network’s* regional group with a membership of more than 50 health, nutrition and physical activity professionals.

Students conducted a 20-question survey to understand the status of drinking water in their school. Based on the findings, they prepared a PhotoVoice presentation and presented it to health education specialists at the County Public Health Department. The Humboldt Health students also contributed to Water Woes, a report produced by the Collaborative.

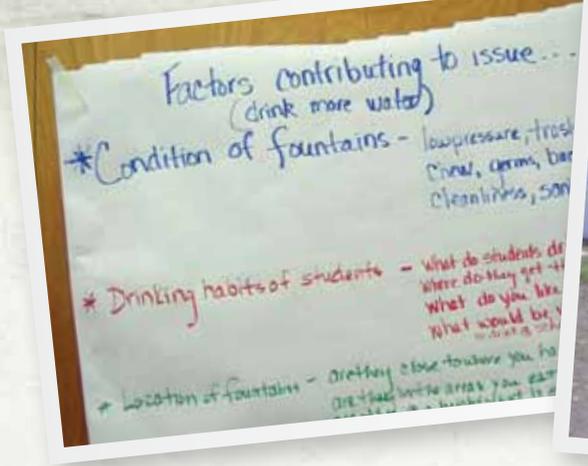
The next year, the Humboldt Health team created a second survey, this time with just five questions to learn more about student attitudes about water. They learned that their peers don’t like to drink out of the fountains because they’re “dirty and the water tastes bad.” Some students indicated that they would drink more water if they had a cleaner source.

At their presentation to the Health Department, the Humboldt Health students learned about hydration stations, an insert in the wall that dispenses water into refillable bottles using infrared sensors. “There’s no touching so it reduces germs,” says project coordinator Colleen Ogle. Additionally, hydration stations reduce the cost and waste associated with bottled water. The school’s Site Council agreed to pay the approximately \$2000 cost to purchase and install this new water distribution mechanism. As a result, Zane Middle School became the first public school in the County to install a hydration station.

CHANGE at Del Norte High School: Ready for a Water Revolution

(Del Norte High School, Del Norte Unified School District)

About 15 to 20 students regularly attend weekly lunchtime meetings of CHANGE, a student-invented acronym that stands for Creating Healthy and Nutritional Goals Everywhere. Following the Youth-led Participatory Action Research curriculum step-by-step, they conducted teambuilding activities, community mapping, and other activities to learn about conditions that impact health and develop their research question. After a lengthy discussion of their school’s nutrition and physical activity issues, students decided to tackle the problem of access to clean drinking water. Water trumped other issues of concern such as the quality of cafeteria food because students believed they could successfully address water.



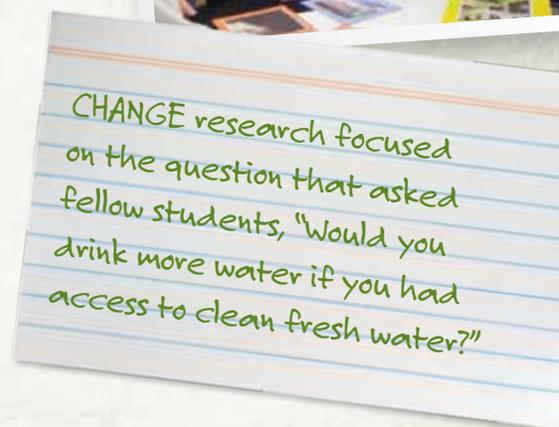
Explaining why students need a special project to obtain clean drinking water in school, adult ally Johanna Danzman says, “You don’t think that in the United States access to clean drinking water would be an issue. That’s like a Third World country problem.” She believes it’s in part a matter of finances, old plumbing and priorities. “Sometimes when you turn on the faucet, rusty water comes out,” she explains. Despite the conditions, fixing the water fountains is not a top priority because other issues such as playground safety and building code compliance take precedence.

CHANGE research focused on the question that asked fellow students, “Would you drink more water if you had access to clean, fresh water?” To begin raising awareness, the students developed a video and presentation to share with the School Board. “They did interviews, took pictures and set it to music to summarize their activities,” says project coordinator Deborah Kravitz. Because it was a special meeting, there were more than 100 teachers in attendance along with a reporter from the local newspaper who published a story on CHANGE.

Next, CHANGE created a survey titled “Is Del Norte High School Ready for a Water Revolution?” They decided to use a hand-written survey rather than an online survey because they thought “it would be taken more seriously,” Johanna explains. By working with the chair of the social studies department, every student in the school received the survey during State-required history exams. Youth researchers then entered responses from the 600 returned surveys into Survey Monkey, a Web-based program they used to analyze the data.

Their overall finding is that students would drink more water if a clean source was available. Johanna noticed that since the nutrition classroom began offering drinking water, more students take advantage of it - a change that supports these findings. “The problem in our school is not that we don’t have water fountains. It’s that they’re dirty and disgusting. People spit in them and put garbage in them and the kids won’t drink out of them,” she explains.

Now that their research is complete, CHANGE is ready to explore solutions. They are considering ideas to increase the availability of clean drinking water like installing hydration stations or modernizing water faucets. Once the students fully develop their recommendations, they’ll explore ways to make action happen such as writing grants, making presentations to local service clubs, and working with the School Board to meet their goal. They are first on the agenda for the first School Board meeting in October 2011.



The Fresh Crew Encourages Healthier Foods at School Events

(San Lorenzo High School, Alameda County Office of Education)

After the school eliminated home economics as an elective due to budget cuts, the kitchen was not being used. Adult ally Leah Mowery decided to take action so she cleaned and restocked it. Now the kitchen is available for teachers to use with classes to prepare recipes that fit their curriculum along with Project EAT activities. During Earth week, Fresh Crew students used the kitchen to host an event with a fruit and vegetable tasting table and a smoothie station. “The kitchen is now becoming a multipurpose, whole school resource rather than for one elective,” says Leah.

The Fresh Crew’s healthier food options group also has generated changes at the school. “There are a lot of spinoffs, things that happen indirectly,” adult ally Leah Mowery explains. “When you have a more intensively trained, core group of students, this creates a ripple effect.” She’s observed that the students take more initiative to participate in school culture. As a result, the desire for healthier food has extended to other school clubs and activities. The Fresh Crew’s involvement with “Sign and Dine” is one example. Youth were mobilized to organize the menu, provide food samples, and recruit volunteers to prepare and serve nutritious food. Youth also received training from qualified professionals in food safety and food handling.

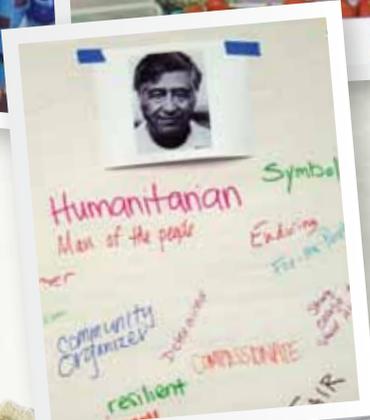
The Fresh Crew decided to target school events to encourage healthier food options. They tried to introduce alternatives by offering tastings, but faced challenges with only five team members and the need to leave class early. They also realized they needed more help to develop their action plan. After attending a *Network*-approved training, they learned how to identify people who have access to or influence over others and recruit them to their cause.

With their newly developed strategy, the Fresh Crew targeted people in charge of school events to ask them to encourage tastings of healthier food. For Cinco de Mayo, they recruited a student club to host a food tasting each day during the week. They approached the Black Student Union Club who agreed to do a tasting. They brought healthy food from different cultures to meetings of the Student International Club.

Next year, The Fresh Crew plans to continue to focus on school events and will present their research results to school staff. After learning that some teachers still serve cookies as an after-school enticement to study, the youth plan to ask teachers to serve healthier options.

The Fresh Crew targeted people in charge of school events to ask them to encourage tastings of healthier food.





Project Expansion Results in Coordinated Research Effort and “Virtual” Walk

(San Bernardino Parks and Recreation)

Since beginning in 2006 with the Westside Steppers, an existing youth group at one YEI pilot site, the San Bernardino Parks and Recreation Department gradually expanded participation from one community center to six. Now, membership on the youth research team is no longer limited to the Westside Steppers and includes any interested youth. Last year, youth at each center conducted independent research projects. But this year, they took a different approach. All the centers are working on the same research project but are responsible for different parts.

Their overall research question is: Does the community get the recommended daily amount of fruits, vegetables, and exercise? Different centers are investigating how much fruit and vegetables, people eat and how much they exercise. The Phoenix East Center youth are compiling a written survey while teams at Lytle Creek and Ruben Campos are developing teen-friendly brochures on the availability of fruits, vegetables, and free or low-cost physical activities in the community. At the Rudy Hernandez Center, youth are working on a Video Voice project to interview adults and youth throughout the community about their nutrition and physical activity habits.

Youth teams from each center also conducted a “virtual” walk from San Bernardino to Universal Studios and back, about 68 miles for each young person. One ambitious team decided to extend their walk to the Big Apple. The youth team at the Nicholson center measures and tracks the number of steps. “One of the staff took a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) class and taught it to the youth. They used that to figure out the length around the park and now they know how many steps it takes for each lap and they don’t have to wear pedometers,” explains Traci Burnett, who coordinates all six sites. The video team filmed some of the kids walking and will include this in their project report.

Project coordinator Glenda Martin Robinson recalls that when the adults asked, “Where is the nutrition aspect?” the youth developed a unique response. Youth began to map out restaurants along the walking route to identify food choices and asked people what they chose to eat. Once the youth have completed their project, they will present their findings to the City Council and the quarterly Parks and Recreation directors meeting.





To get involved.
To do something
that everyone else
is doing. To be
part of a group.

Mountain View Motivators' Pilot Partnerships to Eat Right, Be Active

(Mountain View Middle School, Lamont)

They learned that the majority of the students were eating only 3 to 4 fruit and vegetable servings a day instead of the recommended 7 to 9.

Lamont, California is a rural farming community in the Central Valley and home to Mountain View Middle School, one of the original pilot sites for the Youth Engagement Initiative. Twelve students, six from each grade, participate annually in the well-known youth team (now called SASH). To participate, these seventh and eighth graders complete an application that includes a nutrition essay, teacher recommendations and a commitment to attend weekly meetings.

The initial project of the Mountain View Motivators surveyed students about fruit and vegetable intake and family shopping habits. Two findings from their research stood out. First, they learned that the majority of the students were eating only 3 to 4 fruit and vegetable servings a day instead of the recommended 7 to 9. Additionally, students reported that their families traveled a long distance to buy fresh produce. Students wanted to increase the availability of fruits and vegetables in the community and thought establishing a farmers' market would be a good solution. However, they discovered through their research that this might not be the best strategy for their area so they began to explore other possibilities.

Michael Figueroa, program manager for Kern County Superintendent of Schools, School-Community Partnerships, learned about the Mountain View Motivators and invited them to partner with migrant education students in a service learning project to encourage healthy eating. They created the Eat Right, Be Active campaign, modeled after a similar effort in Mexico.

The students made lawn signs and started knocking on doors at 10 a.m. to ask people to attend a health fair at Lamont School later that day. The health fair offered health screenings, cookbooks, brochures on physical activity and healthy eating, and taste tests with *Network* recipes. Through their work on the campaign, they developed new partnerships with the Family Resource Center and the Sheriff's Activity League that continue to add value to the youth research team's work.



SASH Partners to Establish a Student-Run Food Pantry

(Mountain View Middle School, Lamont)

Mountain View Middle School's third YEI year brought many changes: new students, a new adult ally, a new team name, new projects, and new partnerships. Because the youth team didn't really connect with the previous group's name, they worked through a series of activities with their new adult ally, science teacher Manuel Ramirez, to choose a new name: Stay Alive, Stay Healthy (SASH). Though the Mountain View Motivators changed their identity, their goal remained the same; to make more fruits and vegetables available in the community and to encourage more physical activity.

Continuing the partnership with the migrant education service learning program, project coordinator Yolanda Ramirez and Michael Figueroa approached the Community Action Partnership of Kern to explore the possibility of establishing a youth-run food bank in Lamont. Yolanda describes the work at the food pantry to promote healthy eating and physical activity as "SASH's biggest project over the last four years."

Collaboration with other community groups and organizations are central to their success. SASH developed partnerships with youth groups such as The Boys and Girls Club, the Dolores Huerta Foundation, and St. Augustine's Church so that a different youth team works at the food pantry once every 4 to 6 weeks. The Family Resource Center refers families and provides vouchers for the pantry. The SASH students make nutrition presentations, provide recipes, and offer taste testing to promote *Harvest of the Month*. As a result, their work fulfills the goals of two different, yet complementary programs. The students promote health while also learning service and the values of Cesar Chavez.

"It's had a profound effect on the kids. For many of them, this is the first time they've done community service and it stays with them. Some of the high school students are still very involved and I attribute this to their work at Mountain View," says Manuel. Their work at the food pantry, especially the presentations, also impacts the wider community. Both Yolanda and Manuel say that when the youth speak, people listen in a different way than they would if it was an adult. "We've been able to reach large groups of people with healthy messages and involve more youth than just those who are in SASH," Yolanda says.

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SASH Seeks Improvements to Sidewalks and Trails

(Mountain View Middle School, Lamont)

The SASH (Stay Alive, Stay Healthy) team at Mountain View Middle School partners with South Kern *Building Healthy Communities (BHC)*, a health improvement initiative funded by The California Endowment. In 2010, SASH created a PhotoVoice project and presented it at the South Kern *BHC* meeting to raise awareness about conditions in Lamont that impact health.

An unsafe park, a lack of places to exercise, few sidewalks, limited access to healthy food, and an abundance of fast food and liquor stores were among the issues SASH highlighted. Students also pointed out a flood damaged and mud-covered trail to school that made walking challenging. This caught the attention of Kern County Roads Department staff. As follow-up, engineers met with SASH members to discuss walkability issues in Lamont. The youth asked for the walkway to Mountain View to be fixed, along with other street and sidewalk improvements.

This meeting also led to the submission of a Cal-Trans Safe Routes to School application, prepared with SASH assistance. Though disappointed they didn't receive the grant, adult ally Manuel Ramirez says it was still a valuable experience. The students are now "more conscious about what it's like to work on a goal." The Kern County Roads Department assured the SASH team that they would continue to look for other funds to make the necessary repairs. "But we didn't think that would happen," says project coordinator Yolanda Ramirez.

Engineers recently informed SASH that repairs to the pedestrian pathway to Mountain View Middle School are scheduled to be complete by early fall of 2011. "We can't take all of the credit for making this happen, but we should never underestimate the power of youth. When given a voice and an audience, they have very good ideas and very important things to share with adults and sometimes those adults actually listen!" Yolanda says.



Glossary

Adult Ally: A person who does not identify themselves as a youth who acts in partnership with youth. Adult allies are fostered in personal, cultural, social or institutional relationships through partnerships or mentoring.

Community-Based Research (CBR): A partnership approach to research that equitably involves community members, organization representatives, and academic researchers in all aspects of the research process. CBR aims to increase knowledge and understanding of what is being studied and to integrate the knowledge gained with interventions and policy changes to enhance the health and quality of life of community members.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): Collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in communities in order to improve problems, highlight issues and identify solutions.

PhotoVoice: A participatory action research strategy by which people create and discuss photographs as a means of catalyzing personal and community change.

Popular Education: An approach to collective learning that begins with the lived experiences of participants and results in actions that reflect those experiences.

Praxis: Bringing together critical reflection and concrete action with/in a community in order to transform it.

Service Learning: Engagement in deliberate action that benefits the public good in order to develop, reinforce or strengthen learning goals.

Youth/Adult Partnerships: Intentional relationships established between young people and adults designed to foster and support youth voice.

Youth Development: A growth process occurring during teenage years. For most young people, this learning means meeting the basic personal and social needs to feel cared for and to feel safe, valued, useful, and grounded; and building character, skills and competencies that permit functioning and contribution in daily life.

Youth Empowerment: A process that strengthens and activates a young person's or a peer group's capacity to satisfy their own needs, solve their own problems, and acquire the necessary resources to take control over their life.

Youth-Led: An organization, project or process in which young people decide on what gets done and how it gets done. Youth-led does not necessarily mean "no adult involvement or role."

Youth Voice: The ideas, opinions, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and actions of young people.





Resources

Alliance for a Healthier Generation - Empower Me

<http://healthiergeneration.org/teens.aspx?id=3373>

American Cancer Society

1.800.227.2345

www.cancer.org

American Heart Association

916.446.6505

www.americanheart.org

California Afterschool Resource Center (CASRC)

510.670.4561

www.californiaafterschool.org

California Afterschool Network

530.754.7422

www.afterschoolnetwork.org

California Center for Civic Participation

916.443.2229

www.californiacenter.org

California Department of Education (CDE)

916.319.0800

www.cde.ca.gov

The California Endowment

1.800.449.4149

www.calendow.org

California Project LEAN

916.552.9907

www.californiaprojectlean.org

CANFIT

510.644.1533

www.canfit.org

Center for Collaborative Solutions

916.567.9915

www.ccscenter.org

Community Network for Youth Development

415.495.0622

www.cnyd.org

Corporation for National Services

202.606.5000

www.nationalservice.org

Dairy Council of California

916.263.3560

www.dairycouncilofca.org

Do Something

212.254.2390

www.dosomething.org

The Forum for Youth Investment

301.270.6250

www.forumfyi.org

The Institute for Community Research / National Teen Action Research Center

1.860.278.2044

www.incommunityresearch.org/research/yari.htm

The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

650.723.1137

gardnercenter.stanford.edu/

Network for a Healthy California (Network)

916.449.5400

www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/default.aspx

The Points of Light Foundation, Youth Outreach

202.729.8000

www.pointsoflight.org

UC Davis Center for Regional Change

530.752.3007

<http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu>

USDA - Team Nutrition

703.305.1624

www.fns.usda.gov/TN

Youth Leadership Institute

415.397.2256

www.yli.org

Youth Service America

202.296.2992

www.servenet.org



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