

## Community Beautification Project by Valley Crisis Center

Sexual violence (SV) has a significant negative impact on Californians, particularly women. The rate of contact SV among women in the state is 35 percent during their lifetime. About 17 percent of California men experienced contact SV during their lifetime. “Contact SV” includes rape, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion (sexual penetration after non-physical coercion), and/or unwanted sexual contact.(1) More than 700,000 Californians experience SV per year. Without preventing this violence, these hundreds of thousands of victims multiply in number over a lifetime. A recent report on the costs of SV in California shows that the tangible costs—which include medical care, property damage, victim services, and adjudication—are over \$9 billion per year. The intangible costs—including lost work productivity, earnings loss, and lost quality of life—are over \$130 billion per year.(2)

Valley Crisis Center, a program of Alliance for Community Transformations in Merced County, is a nonprofit organization that provides services to victims of intimate partner violence and sexual violence, as well as comprehensive prevention programs and resources to the community. They are funded to implement Close to Home (C2H), a promising prevention strategy that engages community members to design solutions and lead social change. Youth leaders partner with adult allies to implement specific actions in their communities, address root causes of multiple forms of violence in their community, create safer environments, and thereby prevent sexual violence. One of the ways they created a safer environment was by bringing the community together through a mural project in the City of Planada. The idea was generated as a result of a survey that was disseminated to community members. The community said they wanted to have a meaningful painting completed that served as a positive message, instead of seeing graffiti on buildings. This project took six months of planning and two weeks to complete the mural. The planning and painting process was open to all community members (i.e., school officials, law enforcement, and emergency personnel). With the help of world renowned artist, Joel Artista, they were able to make this dream a reality.

The project was designed to send positive messages of bringing people together to create social change, but it was also a message to support Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). Youth contributed artwork and wrote SAAM prevention messages. Both adults and youths were able to see how the mural impacted the community in a positive way and increased community connection, while at the same time educating the community about sexual violence prevention. This collaboration helped pave the way for making a difference in their community by creating partnerships and building awareness. The youth involved in the project did not see their community as a place that was being claimed by vandals anymore; they saw themselves and others creating something beautiful and this allowed them to feel empowered to take back their community. Through this art, they were able to tell their stories and could envision themselves as future artists and not future gang members or perpetrators. The mural project provided a positive

experience for community members and was an opportunity for community connectedness, increasing protective factors against sexual violence and other forms of violence.

*Federal Fiscal Year 2021 Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant Success Story by the Rape Prevention Program*

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**Footnotes**

1. State of California, Department of Finance, Report P-3: State and County Population Projections by Race/Ethnicity, Detailed Age, and Gender, 2010-2060. Sacramento, California, January 2013.
2. Smith, S.G., Chen, J., Basile, K.C., Gilbert, L.K., Merrick, M.T., Patel, N., Walling, M., & Jain, A. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010-2012 State Report. Atlanta, GA, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2017.