

Research Project Background:

The purpose of our research project was to understand how to better serve Yolo County's students and their families. Data was gathered from two sources: 1) literature in academic journals; and 2) six focus groups (i.e., one each with systems-involved youth, pregnant and parenting teens, youth who have faced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), out-of-school service providers, school-based service providers, and caregivers). Data gathered will help inform service planning and delivery, and ensure that Yolo County builds on the strengths of their families and youth.

Literature Review:

In April of 2018, six Building a Resilient Yolo team members attended a retreat to review literature related to building resilience through schools and communities. We set out to create a working definition of resilience, and to learn about specific strategies and programs developed in the United States and other parts of the world to enhance resilience. The invaluable information gained will directly inform our journey to Build a Resilient Yolo. Below, we synthesize the literature we reviewed and highlight essential topics that emerged.

Resilience Defined:

Resilience is the capacity to experience adversity and draw support and/or strength from the environment where you find yourself (Beno, Fauver, Hunter, Roberts, Souza & Young, 2018).

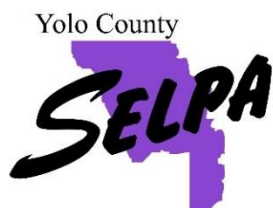
What enhances resilience?

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962) explains an individual's basic human needs, such as their **sense of belonging (i.e., the feeling of being included, accepted, and supported by other persons)**, must be met before any higher level needs can be satisfied. Accordingly, youth benefit from **safe spaces where they experience unconditional belonging by being unconditionally accepted and not rejected (i.e., unconditional spaces)** (Smart, 2012). Smart (2012, p. 33) reports, "Angry youth act in ways that can evoke serial rejection from adults who react with punishment and exclusion." Oppositely, **unconditional space is designed around the needs of the youth** and not problem behavior.
 - a. Brendtro & Shahbazian (2004) advise youth have the following "growth needs": **attaching to caring persons, achieving competence, gaining responsible autonomy, and acting with altruism to others**. These cannot be met if behavior problems trigger consequences designed to exclude youth from rewarding activities supporting the development of growth needs (Smart, 2012).
2. Ungar (2002) advises **building alliances with people's natural supports over time** helps youth and families recover, sustain, and grow from adversity.
 - a. The field of family therapy has refocused attention from family deficits to **identifying and amplifying family strengths** (Nichols & Schwartz, 2000). Through this strength-based approach, therapists and clients collaboratively problem solve and build family strengths as problems are addressed, thereby reducing risk and vulnerability. As families become more resourceful, their ability to address future challenges is enhanced, so interventions double as preventions (Walsh, 2002).

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3. Ungar (2011) explains resilience is best understood not as an individual's capacity to withstand adversity, but instead as the **capacity of individuals to access the resources they need to sustain well-being** and the capacity of their communities to provide them with what they need in ways that are meaningful.
 - a. A community's resilience is its capacity to care for its most vulnerable members through both formal social services (e.g., child welfare, education, corrections, health care, etc.) and informal social supports. Formal social services should be **coordinated, continuous, co-located, and culturally relevant** (Ungar, 2011).
 - b. Communities can build resilience by implementing interventions addressing: **risk prevention/reduction** (i.e., decreasing the dose of adversity individuals receive), **asset enhancement**, and **facilitating protective factors in youth, family, school, and the community** (McElwee, 2007).

4. Brooks (2006) suggests **schools can strengthen resilience** by developing social competence, increasing bonding between students and caring adults, communicating high expectations for students' academic and social performance, maximizing opportunities for meaningful participation of students in the school environment, promoting resilience in school teachers and staff, and creating partnerships with families and community resources.
 - a. Intervention-based models promoting resilience should enhance youth assets, competencies, and potential resources, and focus on youth self-esteem, coping strategies, social support, hope and meaning, optimism, and humor (Baum, 2005). Teachers in the National School Intervention Project-Israel fostered resilience in youth using these classroom activities: **relaxation, exploring fears and feelings, building resources, and finding hope and meaning** (Baum, 2005).
 - b. Researchers have found **educational interventions that involve family members** are more effective than those directed to students only (Finn & Rock, 1997; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997, 1998). Suggested interventions include: **home visits and after-hours phone calls** (Chapman, 2003); **parent education sessions** focused on improving parenting (Catalano, Uerglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2003); and **in-home services for students** with behavioral or academic problems (Catalano et al., 2003).
 - c. School-linked services that locate **social and health services for youth and families within or near school sites** promote collaboration with community resources that increased service usage (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002).

5. Hart (1992) conceptualizes youth participation in practice as a spectrum ranging from forms of non-participation (e.g., youth manipulation, tokenism, etc.) at one end, and full participation (e.g., youth initiating ideas, sharing decisions with adults, etc.), at the other.



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- a. Resilience in youth can be fostered through **meaningful youth participation (i.e., decision-making by youth that involves meaning, control, and connectedness)**. Wierenga (2003) reports that youth have a greater sense of **control** (i.e., making decisions, being heard, and having the resources, skills and knowledge to see the task through and do it well), **meaning** (i.e., doing something that has a bigger purpose and that the youth believes in), and **connectedness** (i.e., working with others, and having a sense of belonging and positive relationships with adults and peers) when they are involved in the decisions affecting them.

Key questions for discussion and planning next steps:

- Recognizing resilience is an ecological phenomenon, how can Yolo County create a **framework for interventions** where natural/organic support systems work more effectively with formal/institutional systems of support?
 - o How is Yolo County connecting people who need help to resources and systems of support? Are Yolo County’s systems of support reaching the people they need to reach? How do people in Yolo County access information about resources and support?
 - o How can Yolo County identify where resilience building is already happening and capitalize on it?
 - o How can Yolo County bring agencies together to link informal and formal systems of support so that when people are seeking help **“no door is the wrong one”**?
- How can Yolo County create additional **opportunities for meaningful youth participation** that involves youth decision making?
- How can Yolo County utilize the concept of unconditional spaces to **help youth increase their sense of belonging**?

