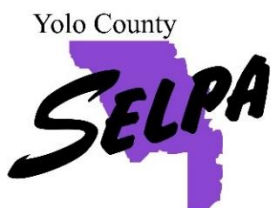


## Building a Resilient Yolo: Research Project



**Yolo County  
Health and  
Human Services**



### **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 events (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. Key findings and recommendations from the focus groups, conducted by the Hanover Research Firm in April of 2018, are discussed below.*

### **Key Findings from Focus Groups:**

#### **Youth Perceptions of Support:**

- The setting of goals, both short-term and long-term, is crucial to youths' personal success. Students noted the importance of defining one's own goals, and the positive effect that reaching such goals has on their self-esteem. The kind of goals that youth set for themselves vary widely, from context-specific ones – such as getting off probation –, to longer-term career goals.
- Youth in these groups consider self-reliance a positive trait and, partly, a measure of success. They strive to become self-reliant in the sense that they want to foster their self-confidence and become resilient to (negative) peer influence. This may impede their leveraging of certain support offerings, in particular those concerned with providing emotional support.
- Financial security is a big concern for youth in these focus groups. They want more support in understanding their options for earning money short-term, as well as with planning their longer-term career goals. They are less interested in emotional support; many participants reject the idea of asking for personal advice or sharing personal feelings with anyone.
- Youth highlight Yolo County Construction Program (YCCP) as a positive example of a program that provides them with a structure in their lives. YCCP keeps them in school on the one hand, but enables them to work – and thus, addresses one of their core concerns – on the other hand.
- Youth best relate to adults who have had similar experiences to their own, and who can speak to how they have overcome these challenges. In students' eyes, advice from such individuals is more valuable than advice from well-meaning teachers and professionals. In this context, youth recommend bringing more outside speakers to schools.

#### **Caregivers:**

- Caregivers rely on service providers such as counselors, school psychologists, and educators for emotional support and/or strategic advice.
- The visibility of Yolo County's support offerings to caregivers could be improved.
- Caregivers in this focus group did not perceive urgent gaps in the support offerings available to them.

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Yolo County



### Service Providers:

- A main goal of service providers' support strategies for high school-aged youth is to enable them to make healthy choices for themselves.
- Service providers' main strategy for building resilience in youth is to establish a personal relationship that provides students with a model of a stable, caring adult.
- Main roadblocks that out-of-school service providers encounter include the appeal of gang lifestyle, the impact of youths' home lives, and drug use. Gang presence, which providers describe as strong in parts of Yolo County, models a way of life that promises quick riches.
- Service providers would like to see social-emotional learning supports used more widely, and for an ecosystem of care to be established that reaches youth earlier in their development, which includes a system that shifts from being reactive to preventative.
- To support students more effectively, service providers would like to see a shift in Yolo County's systemic culture from perceiving students who are showcasing difficult behavior as problematic and willfully disobedient, to an emphasis on understanding these students' personal situation and experiences, and how these may affect their behavior. Service providers cite trauma-informed care as a good model in this context.

### Recommendations from the Hanover Research Firm:

- Yolo County should improve communication around its support offerings to service providers and caregivers, ideally in form of direct emails.
- Yolo County should explore options to extend outreach to students at a younger age, in order to connect them to the system in a more preventative manner.
- Yolo County should take steps to build a culture of care among service providers, based on social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care.
- Yolo County should consider building a mentoring program that connects struggling students with adults who have overcome similar challenges.

