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May 18th Santa Cruz County's Youth Violence Prevention Day

Santa Cruz County, CALIF. – May 18th is Youth Violence Prevention Day in Santa Cruz County, marking four years since the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors endorsed *Turning the Curve: Santa Cruz County's Youth Violence Prevention Strategic Plan*, which has led to meaningful change in the lives of local youth.

The Youth Violence Prevention Task Force (YVPT) is a community collaborative that seeks long-lasting changes in our community by addressing root causes of violence. Made up of over 200 active members and 50 organizations representing sectors including schools, law enforcement, government, youth, community volunteers, and program and service providers, the YVPT is taking a stand in addressing issues of inequity, and implementing inclusive, community-centered strategies to tackle this complex social issue. By prioritizing strategies included in *Turning the Curve* and diving more deeply into root causes, YVPT is maximizing impact and meaningful engagement.

"Over the past four years, we have made significant progress toward a safer community for our youth," said Sarah Emmert, Director of Community Organizing for the United Way of Santa Cruz County. "This really is a case of a community coming together to address the root causes of violence and work toward solutions."

Current efforts of the Youth Violence Prevention Task Force include:

- Using a Dialogues to Change Model, YVPT is strengthening trust and understanding between law enforcement and community members, addressing issues of racial inequities, and enrolling youth and community as change agents in public safety efforts. YVPT has implemented 5 dialogue circles, meeting over 6 weeks, across Santa Cruz County and focused on relationship and trust building; perceptions and experiences; and collaborative planning to create trauma-informed policing, racial healing and community inclusion.
- In response to increased youth-involved crime and violence in the Soquel corridor near the Emerald Bay Apartments, in the spring of 2017 YVPT members came together to discuss violence prevention efforts in the area. YVPT partners offered summer activities and supported the development of a Resident Committee so that providers could work with the community to meet their needs. In March of 2019, YVPT members launched a weekly homework club where volunteers and peers are providing academic support. Supervisor John Leopold wrote an op-ed outlining the innovative approach: <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2019/03/31/john-leopold-emerald-bay-apartments-shows-us-all-how-to-be-leaders/>.
- Recognizing the need for early intervention, YVPT embarked on a project to highlight prevention with middle school-aged youth. The Task Force found a need for increased awareness of available programs and prevention programming for youth ages 10-14 that is diverse, accessible, and appealing.

Through Project Thrive, the Youth Violence Prevention Task Force is taking a diversified approach to better meet the needs boys and men of color who are victims of violence, by providing a combination of direct service and supporting capacity building with local partners to create more trauma-informed and equitable web of support for these communities. Efforts include a street outreach program that works in partnership with behavioral health experts to provide both clinical and general support services.

Project Thrive is also developing other strategies including a coordinated critical incident response system, promoting restorative justice in schools, and convening stakeholders for trainings, workshops, and ongoing peer learning and support sessions to advance ideas and tools on the issues of trauma-informed systems, culturally responsive organizations, and addressing implicit bias. Project Thrive is a partnership between Applied Survey Research, Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health, Santa Cruz County Probation, Santa Cruz County Office of Education, and United Way of Santa Cruz County, and is funded by a grant through the Department of Justice.

Media and members of the public are invited to attend the YVPT's Community-Law Enforcement Dialogue Action Forum, where participants from across the county will celebrate work toward making the vision of a safe and equitable community a reality.

WHAT: Youth Violence Prevent Task Force Action Forum

WHEN: June 5, 2019, 6 p.m.-8 p.m.

WHERE: Temple Beth El, 3055 Porter Gulch Road, Aptos

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