



County of Santa Cruz

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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PRESS RELEASE

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The County of Santa Cruz is pleased to announce a \$1 million Department of Justice grant aimed at breaking the cycle of violence among the County's Latino and African American men and boys.

The grant, one of the largest DOJ grants awarded in California this fiscal year, allows the County and its partners to build on years of work analyzing and addressing the root causes of violence in our community. The three-year award will allow the further implementation of the Santa Cruz County Youth Violence Prevention Plan, which was released in May.

"This award will mean a lot to our families and to our kids," Santa Cruz County Probation Chief Fernando Giraldo said. "It will allow us to reach out and meet youths at their hour of greatest need, help them heal and help us break the cycle of violence."

Awarded by the DOJ's Office for Victims of Crime, the grant will fund a new program called "Project Thrive." A collaboration between the County Probation Department and the Criminal Justice Council's Youth Violence Prevention Taskforce, Project Thrive will deploy outreach workers and mental health liaisons to help youths overcome the impacts of violence, while also developing policies and procedures to help minimize the psychological and sociological effects of trauma.

"I am pleased the Department of Justice continues to recognize Santa Cruz County's innovative approach to criminal justice, including victim assistance," Santa Cruz County Chief Administrative Officer Susan A. Mauriello said. "Too often, we overlook the negative impacts violent crime can have on our children."



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Research indicates that exposure to any form of violence, even among crime witnesses, can cause substantial harm, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. That can lead children to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods and schools, sometimes turning to violent behavior as a defense mechanism to protect themselves.

Breaking that cycle is one way to keep youths away from gang involvement and criminal activity. One in every five gang arrests in Santa Cruz County is of a minor, according to data compiled by the Santa Cruz County Gang Task Force.

Under the proposal and with the help of partners United Way of Santa Cruz County and Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Project Thrive will first work to identify community resources and needs before developing an action plan in April 2016 that will identify, engage, screen and link young Latino and African American male survivors of violence to essential services.

The core of that plan includes the use of street outreach workers who can connect with youths and steer them toward positive outcomes, as well as mental health liaisons who will work with law enforcement agencies to minimize the harm violence causes to victims.