



## Why Invest in Youth Development?

For the last 40 years, educators, politicians and community leaders have been trying to resolve the deep seeded issues facing our youth—academic failure, drug use, teen pregnancy, juvenile crime, and lack of workforce readiness. These efforts have returned mixed to poor results.

**“Problem-free is not fully prepared.”**

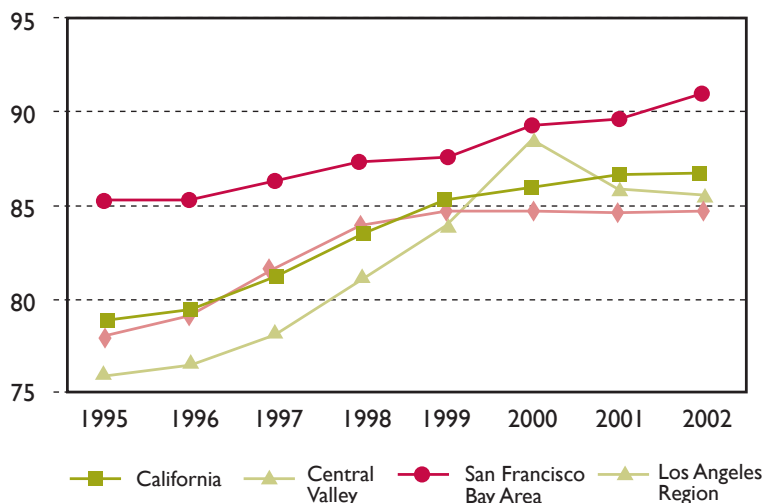
— Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment

Youth “problems” are often caused by underlying issues that are widespread and chronic: persistent poverty, parents’ lack of family management skills, lack of supports and opportunities, and lack of clear standards in the community. As a result, many youth experience difficulties in school, have poor navigation and decision making skills, lack a sense of purpose and/or the ability to affect change.

Even when “problems” are addressed, youth are not being prepared for college, work and life. Repeated studies across of the nation’s employers show that today’s workforce lacks the soft skills needed to ensure worker success.

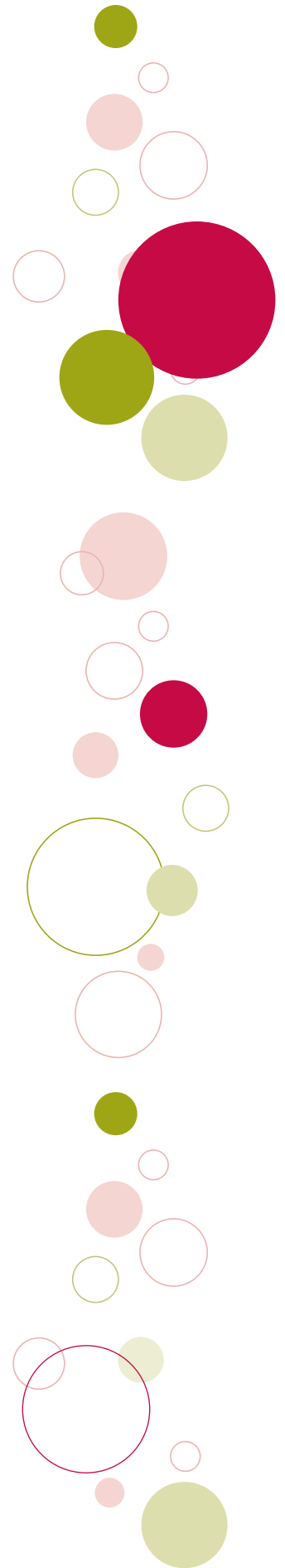
## What are the obstacles youth face in the Sacramento region?

**High School Graduation Rate (per 100 Students)  
1995-2002**



- The Sacramento region has a substantially higher child poverty rate at 23% than the statewide rate of 18%.
- The percentage of students who have completed high school in the Central Valley has consistently been lower than the nationwide and statewide average at 84.8%.
- Child abuse rates are much higher throughout the Sacramento region than the rest of the state. With a child maltreatment rate of 17.3 per 1,000 children, the Sacramento region has a higher child maltreatment rate than the state overall (12.2 per 1,000 children).
- Although the rate of juvenile arrests for felonies and violent offenses has been declining slowly since 2000, the Central Valley still has a much higher juvenile arrest rate for drug- and alcohol-related offenses (11.2 per 1,000) than the state (9.5 per 1,000).
- In 2005, there were 4,443 children in foster care in Sacramento.
- In Sacramento County, approximately 375 foster youth will 'age out' of the foster care system this year (Sacramento County, 2008). Statewide, of those youth leaving foster care:
  - 65% will leave without a place to stay
  - 50% will be homeless within 18 months
  - 50% or less will be employed 2.5 to 4 years after leaving foster care, and
  - 38% will have maintained employment for at least one year

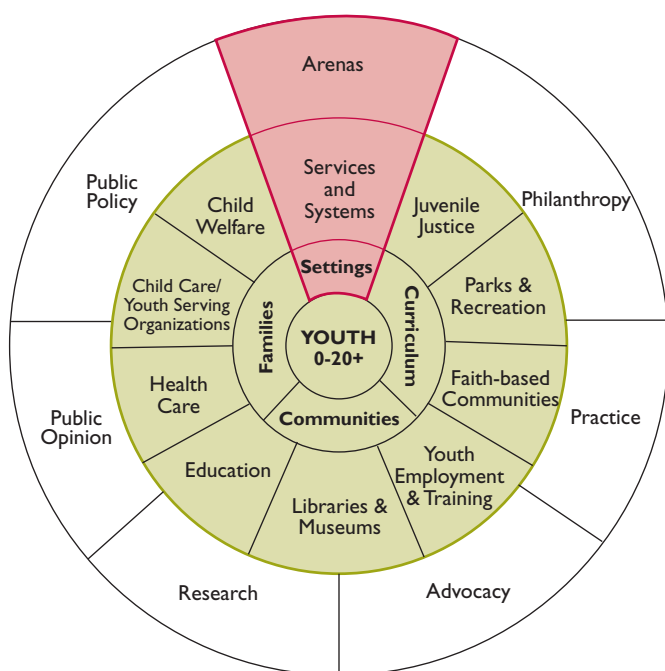
(Source: *Families and Children on the Move*)



**The question remains: Whose responsibility is it to help youth develop appropriately, and how?**

In the absence of positive influences, youth will find other ways, often negative ones like gangs, to meet their needs. Since youth are always in the process of developing, every setting matters. Each sector has a job to help youth develop positively:

- **Schools:** Help youth develop cognitively, physically, socially, and civically
- **Faith Community:** Help youth develop morally
- **Businesses:** Help youth develop job skills
- **Civic Organizations:** Help youth become engaged in community service projects.



Forty years of youth development research shows that at-risk youth can become successful in spite of the odds they face.

**According to Gambone/Connell, the five basic supports and opportunities all youth need in order to overcome obstacles in their homes, schools and communities are:**

- Emotional and Physical Safety
- Caring Relationships
- Youth Participation
- Community Involvement
- Skill building

## Is Sacramento County giving youth the key supports and opportunities they need to successfully transition to adulthood?

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is one of the only widely used surveys in the state that asks students if they have caring adults, safe places, opportunities to participate and adults who have high expectations of them. The data measures both school and community connections which are high predictors of academic success.

### The CHKS data for Sacramento County shows that...

- ...only 32% of students in 7th-grade believe their school provides them with caring relationships.

- ...only 31% of students in 11th-grade report caring relationships in school.

- ...only 63% of the 7th-grade students report having caring relationships in the community while 60% of 11th-grade students report the same.

The survey shows a similar pattern when Sacramento County students are asked if adults in the school and community have high expectations of them...

- ...only 49% of the 7th-grade students and 40% of the 11th-grade students reported that school staff members have high expectations of them.

- ...only 63% of the 7th-grade students and 60% of the 11th-grade students reported that members of their community have high expectations of them.

When surveyed about opportunities for meaningful participation in their school and community...

- ...only 18% of the 7th-grade students and 15% of the 11th-grade students in Sacramento County reported that they had meaningful opportunities.

- ...only half (49%) of the 7th-grade students and 42% of the 11th-grade students reported that they had access to meaningful participation in their community.

Nationally, America's Promise reports that...

- ...only 30% of youth report having four of the five promises of caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education and opportunities to help others.

“Deficits in basic skills cost businesses, colleges, and under prepared graduates as much as \$16 billion annually...

—Ernst & Young

## **What is the impact on our community if we DO NOT invest in youth development?**

**Increases in problem alcohol use, illicit drug use, teenage sexuality and acts of violence.**

### **Lack of readiness for the workforce:**

According to research conducted by FSG Social Impact Advisors:

- Of 100 9th-grade students entering public high school in any major U.S. city, 70 will stay in school to graduate, 30 will enter college/university or technical school, and of these only 18 will earn a college degree in four years.
- Ten million U.S. jobs could go unfilled by 2010 because the available workforce will lack the needed skills to fill the positions.
- Deficits in basic skills cost businesses, colleges and under-prepared graduates as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial expenses.
- America's high-school graduation rate ranks 16th of 20 developed countries, with Germany, Japan and France, among many others, all reporting higher rates.

## **What is the impact on our community if we DO invest in youth development?**

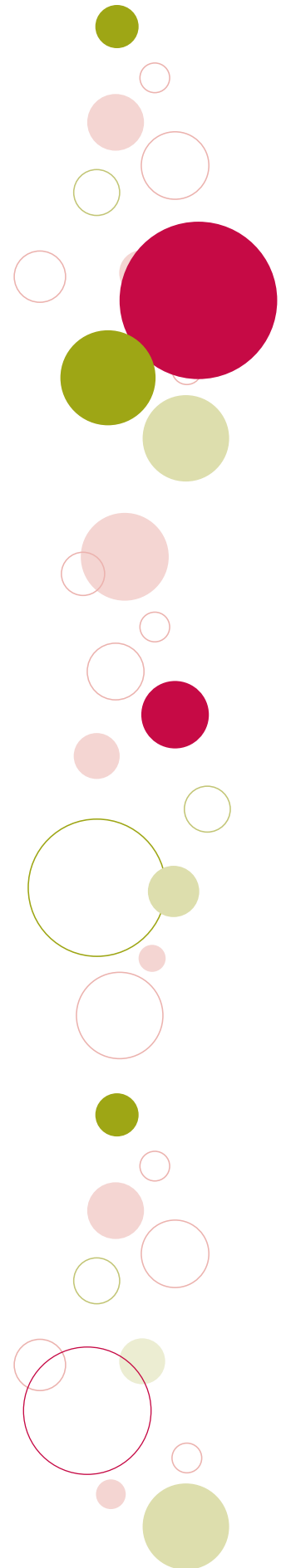
According to the National Research Council, Institute of Medicine:

- The more supports and assets youth have, the better they do.
- Continuous exposure to positive settings, experiences and people, as well as opportunities to gain life skills supports youth's positive development.
- Communities that invest in more opportunities for youth and ensure that they are high-quality settings are more likely to see youth do better.

### **Be Part of Community-wide Change**

There's no doubt that youth in the Sacramento region are in desperate need of care and support. Although high-quality programs can make a difference in the lives of youth, young people grow up in communities, not programs. The Youth Development Network (YDN) is committed to supporting the following community-level change that we believe will better foster the positive development of all of youth:

1. Strengthen the human services workforce and training infrastructure to support youth development.
2. Support policies that increase key supports and opportunities for all youth (i.e. more mentoring programs, expanded hours for after



school, more jobs for youth, life skills training for students). All institutions adopt the Regional Compact for Children and Youth.

3. Expand communities' capacity for research, evaluation and networking resources.
4. Work with local school districts, community-based organizations and cities to develop partnerships that promote community service learning.
5. Support policies that expand leadership opportunities for all youth in schools, cities, community-based organizations, and businesses.

**Will you join YDN as we work to ensure we continue to work towards:**

- Youth's readiness for adulthood
- Policies that support high quality and expanded opportunities for youth success
- Coordinated systems and services
- Support to organizations for effective practices

To read more on why you should invest in Youth Development, please download the full report at [www.ydnetwork.org](http://www.ydnetwork.org). Be a part of community wide change, find out how by contacting YDN today.



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