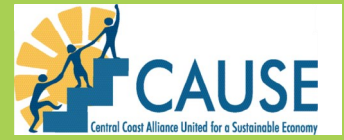


# The CAUSE Santa Paula Youth Town Hall: Youth Voices! Youth Choices!



## A Youth-Led Town Hall to Create a Vision for Measure T

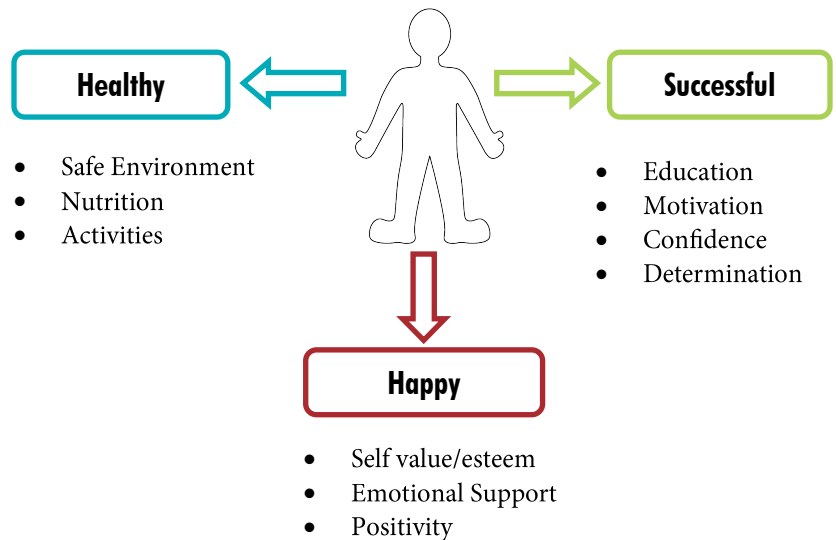
Measure T was passed to promote public safety in Santa Paula, not just through more police funding, but also by addressing root causes, including investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in creating positive opportunities for youth in our community. On April 12th, Santa Paula youth organizations including Interact, Optimist Club, SESPEA, Link Crew, CSF, Equality Club, AVID, Cancer Crushers, Music Club, National Honors Society and CAUSE organized a youth town hall for young people to share their opinions about what youth programs are needed most in Santa Paula. Over 100 students came together to discuss what they would like to see for themselves and their peers, to help guide city leaders in meeting the needs identified by local youth.

### Youth Town Hall Format

- Approximately 100 youth attended the town hall, with SPHS staff, teachers and adults observing. The planning, organization, and facilitation was entirely led by youth.
- After participants signed in, they signed up for the Remind app so they could participate in voting later in the program. Youth separated into 10 groups based on issues they were most interested in.
- In their groups as an ice breaker, youth were asked to illustrate what they thought made up a healthy, successful, happy young person .
- In the first breakout session, participants discussed issues that exist for youth in Santa Paula, identified what youth programs already exist, and brainstormed unmet youth needs.
- During the second breakout session, youth discussed their ideas for potential programs that don't exist in Santa Paula and what could be changed about current programs to reach their full potential.
- Afterwards, youth voted through the Remind app by texting their top three priorities of programs they would like to be implemented through the Measure T funding.
- After a dinner of tamales and pizza was served, the program ended with an interactive raffle of various prizes.
- An engaging, participatory, and fun process envisioned, organized and led by youth was critical to successfully bringing the youth perspective to a process that had lacked youth participation.

## What Makes a Healthy, Successful and Happy Young Person?

Common themes identified during youth discussion:



# What do Youth Want?

After brainstorming ideas for meeting the needs of youth in our community, participants were asked to vote for their top three priorities. The results fell into the following categories:

## **Counseling Therapy and Mental Health (19.9%)**

Services to address mental health, trauma, and family issues facing youth.

## **Internship Opportunities (17%)**

Connecting young people to career internships and mentorship opportunities.

## **Youth Center (12.5%)**

Offering spaces for youth to find positive opportunities, grow, and hang out together.

## **Language Education (11%)**

Language classes to support new English Learners and foreign language classes.

## **Trade Programs (8.5%)**

Connecting young people with hands-on career and technical education in schools.

## **Access to Healthy Food (7.8%)**

Improving access to healthy food through farmers markets, cooking classes etc.

## **Arts and Culture (7.5%)**

Providing opportunities for creative expression in art, music and performance.

## **Recreational Programs (5%)**

Citywide sports programs to promote physical activity and wellness.

## **Transportation and Mobility (3.6%)**

Supporting youth mobility through public transportation and driver's education.

## **Education Assistance (3.6%)**

Tutoring services to aid students with additional assistance in classes and testing.

## **Leadership Opportunities (3.2%)**

Increasing youth voice and participation in civic decision making.



## **How Santa Paula can meet the top priorities of local youth:**

### **1) Investing in Mental Health, Therapy and Counseling**

The top priority for youth was addressing mental health through services and counseling. 20% of votes were concerned with youth lacking access to programs or support groups to address mental health issues like depression, trauma and adverse childhood experiences, and family issues like abuse and neglect facing young people.

### **2) Providing an Internship Program**

The second priority was improving access to internships and mentorship opportunities. 17% of votes went towards the need for internship programs that would connect more students to positive career pathways through job skills, workplace experience, mentor relationships, professional networks, and leadership opportunities.

### **3) Creating a Drop-In Teen Center**

The third priority was to create a drop-in youth center as a dedicated safe space for young people in Santa Paula. 13% of votes voiced a desire for a facility specifically open to local youth that would provide recreation, arts, and cultural programs, creating a central gathering place for young people to have access to positive, fun activities.



# Recommendations for Youth Programs in Santa Paula

## #1: Provide Specialized Mental Health Services and Counseling for Youth by Contracting with Nonprofits or the County

Youth Town Hall participants often expressed that **depression, anxiety, neglect and emotional/physical abuse is far too prevalent among their peers.** They felt that young people don't know where to turn in these situations or where to seek help, with few resources available to break cycles of abuse and violence and to heal from traumatic childhood experiences. The rise in school shootings has identified the desperate need to invest in mental health services for young people. Youth said they would like to see the city invest in mental health and counseling programs more accessible to youth.

**Specific mental health services youth would like to see include support groups for physical and emotional abuse, counseling, one-to-one and group therapy, youth peer support groups, gang prevention programs, drug rehabilitation and culturally-competent family therapy.** While the city may not have experience directly providing mental health services, the city could contract for services with local nonprofits or public agencies by providing grants through an open bidding process.

### Potential local partners to provide mental health services could include:

#### Mental Wellness Center

Santa Barbara-based nonprofit connects teens to medical and professional care and teaches important skills on how to manage mental health conditions, provides presentations in 6th and 9th grade classes and has clubs at high school campuses throughout the city.

#### Casa Pacifica

Treats foster and at-risk youth who have suffered from trauma, and/or exhibit complex emotional and behavioral issues, or whose family is in crisis. Their services are designed to teach skills, restore hope, and help youth and their families find joy in daily living.

#### Ventura County Behavioral Health

Youth and Family Services program provides integrated mental health services including psychiatric assessment and treatment, case management, outpatient individual and group therapy, psychological testing, school-based services, home-based services, acute care of crisis and hospitalization.

## #2 Create a City-Run Internship Program Connecting Youth with Mentors in Local Businesses, Nonprofits, and Public Agencies

Youth Town Hall participants emphasized that **there are limited opportunities for students in Santa Paula to be connected to internships and mentors.** For a working-class immigrant community like Santa Paula, youth often lack connections to diverse career pathways. Students would like to see an internship program that connects them to local businesses, non-profits and public agencies.

**The city could develop an internship program by hiring an Internship Coordinator that would connect students to local opportunities for positive career pathways through job skills, workplace experience, mentor relationships, professional networks, and leadership opportunities.**

### A City Internship Coordinator's responsibilities could include:

- Identify businesses, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies interested in having an intern placed with them and **build lasting relationships with a diverse range of hosts and mentors**
- Create a **single common application** that students who are interested in participating can submit
- Provide a **centralized location and placement process**, eliminating confusion that students often experience when searching for an internship or job opportunities
- **Place students with internship hosts** to match students' skills, experiences and interests with hosts unique needs, opportunities and requirements
- **Follow up regularly** to ensure both interns and hosts needs are being met and provide a structured supervision and evaluation process

# Recommendations for Youth Programs in Santa Paula Cont.

## #3 Create a Drop-In Teen Center Similar to Models in Fillmore, Ventura and Thousand Oaks Where Youth Can Find Positive Activities

Many Youth Town Hall participants felt that young people do not have a dedicated safe place they can go to find positive activities. Often young people are criticized for hanging out in the “streets”, but without a dedicated facility that is welcoming and accessible to our youth, that can be the only place they have. They emphasized the need for places where youth can find themselves, connect with their peers, and be in a safe place they can call their own. Some of these ideas included:

- Create a Drop-In Teen Center that is **available to youth ranging from 13-19 years old** that is located in an accessible and walkable area walkable from local schools where youth can **go any time without an annual membership or registration**.
- The Center should provide a variety of programs to create a welcoming space for students with varying interests, making it a space for all youth. This could include **programs such as art, and culture, a music room, recreation and sports equipment, kitchen providing meals and culinary classes, community garden, lounging area, transportation and bus passes, computer lab, and tutoring services.**
- The Drop-In Teen Center would be run by adult staff but also include a youth advisory committee focusing on leadership development and community engagement.
- The Drop-In Center would be a space that provides positive recreational activities but will follow One Step a la Vez’s model that transforms youth to be empowered, equipped with the tools to lead, cultivate cultural awareness and bridge the gaps of inequality to develop healthy individuals and healthy community.
- The Drop-In Center can also host Mental Health Services and Counseling and the Internship Program by locating these programs in the Center.

### Evaluating Local Models of Drop-In Teen Centers:

After the forum, student leaders toured youth centers in neighboring cities in Ventura County including Fillmore, Ventura, and Thousand Oaks, to research what models exist and what would be the best fit for Santa Paula teens.

These drop-in centers included most or all of the programs that Youth Town Hall participants hoped a Santa Paula Drop-In Teen Center would incorporate, but were implemented in different ways and had differing strengths and weaknesses.

The Thousand Oaks Teen Center provided a valuable community resource but lacked services like food and transportation, which suggests it may be better suited to the more affluent youth population in the Conejo Valley and might be a less suitable model for Santa Paula. The City of Ventura’s Westpark Community Center’s target age group is 6-10 year olds so the layout of the center is highly structured with scheduled rotations into different activities every day. For younger children, this model is valuable but teens preferred the flexibility that was modeled in the One Step a la Vez center, because it was open to older youth and at risk youth that can drop into whichever activities they would like to participate in. Student leaders believe that the center modeled by One Step a la Vez is the best fit for Santa Paula teens.

### Budget Recommendations for Measure T

The city has allocated over **\$500,000** from the annual Measure T budget for youth programs and services. This provides sufficient resources to create a fully-funded drop-in teen center, hire a summer internship program coordinator, and contract for a significant investment in mental health services. If city leaders hope to achieve the most effective results from Measure T revenue used for youth programs, we strongly recommend they listen to what local youth say that young people in Santa Paula need most. The city could use approximately **\$100,000** for grants to provide Mental Health and Counseling services for youth in Santa Paula, spend approximately **\$100,000** on salary, benefits, and overhead for a Summer Internship Program coordinator on city staff, and direct approximately **\$300,000** towards the annual budget of a Drop-In Teen Center in Santa Paula, either contracted to a nonprofit or run by the city.

Westpark Community Center Annual Budget		Fillmore One Step a la Vez Annual Budget	
	City-Run		Nonprofit
Staff Salaries	\$ 194,598	Staff Salaries and Benefits	\$170,500
Staff Benefits	\$ 27,588	Grantwriting, Fundraising, Payroll, Financial Admin	\$ 7,600
Workers' Comp	\$ 5,574	Facilities, Maintenance, and Equipment	\$ 13,100
Wages for Extra Help	\$ 100,925	Food, Travel, and Training	\$ 9,050
Services, Utilities, and Supplies	\$ 29,353	Insurance and Workers' Comp	\$ 14,000
Facilities, Maintenance, and Technology	\$ 124,684	Operations (Equipment, Supplies, Utilities)	\$ 15,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 354,209</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 229,550</b>

Recommended Budget for Measure T Youth Programs	
	\$ 500,000
Drop-In Teen Center	\$ 300,000
Summer Internship Program	\$ 100,000
Grants for Mental Health and Counseling Services	\$ 100,000