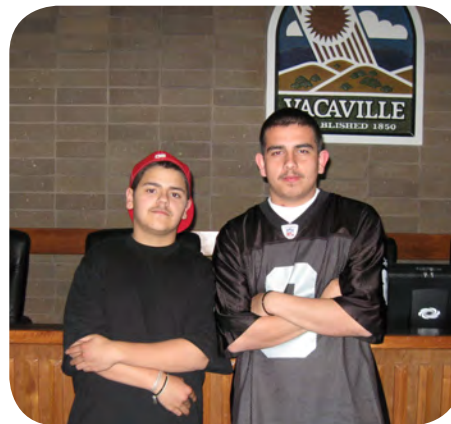


# Vacaville Youth a community profile

Researched and written by the  
Vacaville Youth Roundtable REACH Coalition

a Community Action coalition of  
Sierra Health Foundation's REACH youth program



## Introduction

In September 2008, the Vacaville Youth Roundtable (VYRT) received a REACH Community Action grant from Sierra Health Foundation. The purpose of this grant is to assess the community's strengths, challenges, resources and readiness to improve conditions for local youth, and then develop an action plan to make long-term changes for Vacaville.

The VYRT is an 18-year-old collaborative for youth-related issues in the community. Its mission is to promote a healthy community by supporting opportunities for youth.

The VYRT is facilitated by the city manager and the participants are key leaders and stakeholders in the community, such as city council members, the chief of police, the Vacaville Unified and Travis Unified school districts, the Vacaville Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club, Solano Probation Department, faith-based organizations and other city and nonprofit agencies that provide services to youth. Several dedicated VYRT members participated on the REACH subcommittee to move forward with partnering youth and caring adults.

In the fall of 2008, the Vacaville Youth Roundtable embarked on creating a Youth Coalition. We had our first Vacaville Coalition meeting in November and soon after began the work of finding out what it's like to be a young person in Vacaville. Coalition members conducted a community assessment, with community meetings, focus groups, surveys and data collection.

After looking at all of the information collected, we identified the issues young people face, as well as what youth need to grow and thrive in Vacaville. This community profile is the result of our findings.

## Our Mission

The Vacaville REACH Coalition promotes the physical, emotional and social well-being of all youth by advocating for policies and systems changes that unleash the power and potential of all youth to succeed.

## Our Vision for Vacaville is one in which

- Youth are valued.
- Youth are safe at all times in all places.
- Schools offer a variety of youth-centered educational opportunities that prepare youth for graduation and provide them with the knowledge necessary to experience a successful future.
- There are leadership opportunities for youth in the community.
- Youth live in neighborhoods that are clean and environmentally friendly.
- All youth have healthy relationships with trusted adults.

## Our Guiding Principles

- We recognize the importance of youth in our community.
- We place a high value on diversity.
- We believe that all youth have the ability to make a positive impact in our community.

*Photo: Vacaville Youth Roundtable members Kevin and Carlos*

## The Vacaville Community

Vacaville has a population of approximately 96,000 people and is located midway between San Francisco and Sacramento in northern Solano County. Vacaville is a growing biotechnology/ pharmaceutical hub with facilities operated by Genentech, Alza Corporation, Kaiser Permanente and Novartis International AG. The California Medical Facility is located in Vacaville, as is California State Prison Solano. Vacaville is also home to one of the largest shopping outlets in California.

The median household income in Vacaville is equal to or slightly above the median household income of all Solano County residents. Of all of the families in Vacaville with children under the age of 18, only 6.6% are estimated to live below the poverty level.

In Vacaville, an estimated 15.4% of residents speak a language other than English at home. In the Vacaville Unified School District, 12.1% of students are classified as English learners, while 3.7% of students in the Travis Unified School District are classified as English learners. The majority of English learners in both the VUSD and the TUSD identify Spanish as their primary language.

There are approximately 22,500 children under age 18 in Vacaville.



*Vacaville coalition members participate in a group game at a coalition meeting.*

## Youth in the community

Two school districts operate public schools in the Vacaville community, the Vacaville Unified School District and the Travis Unified School District.

### Vacaville Unified School District (VUSD)

- Vacaville High School — 2,114 students
- Will C. Wood High School — 2,106 students
- Buckingham Charter Magnet HS — 378 students
- Country High School — 132 students
- Vacaville Community Day Prep — 18 students
- Vaca Peña Middle School — 1,008 students
- Willis Jepson Middle School — 1,039 students

### Travis Unified School District (TUSD)

- Vanden High School — 1,515 students
- Travis Education Center — 81 students
- Travis Community Day School — 14 students
- Golden West Middle School — 835 students

### Faith-based private schools

- Bethany Lutheran School (K-8)
- Vacaville Christian School (K-12)
- Notre Dame School (K-8)
- Vacaville Adventist School (K-8)
- Faith Academy

Home school groups operate in Vacaville as well.

In the VUSD, 192 members of the graduating class of 2007 dropped out of high school over the four-year period of their high school career. In the district, 3.2% of white students, 6.7% of African-American students and 5.4% of Hispanic or Latino students dropped out of high school prior to graduation.

In the TUSD, 11 members of the graduating class of 2007 dropped out of high school over the four-year period of their high school career. In this district, 1.2% of white students, 2.8% of African-American students and 7.3% of Hispanic or Latino students dropped out of high school prior to graduation.

The student population in both the VUSD and the TUSD is representative of a variety of cultures and ethnicities; however, white, non-Hispanic individuals make up the greatest number of students in both districts.

## What we've learned about Vacaville youth

Vacaville youth completed 1,730 surveys during the assessment period in March 2009. The majority of those surveys were collected from Vaca Peña Middle School (777) and Willis Jepson Middle School (678).

### SAFETY

Of the 7th- and 8th-grade students who responded to the survey at Vaca Peña Middle School, 89% responded that they feel safe in their neighborhood. Similarly, 90.4% of the 7th- and 8th-grade students surveyed at Willis Jepson Middle School responded that they feel safe in their neighborhood. Students of both Vaca Peña Middle School and Willis Jepson Middle School who responded that they do not feel safe in their neighborhood noted that they do not feel safe because of the presence of gangs, gang activity and drug use. Many Willis Jepson Middle School students also noted that they do not feel safe in their neighborhood because they perceive their neighborhood as being "bad" or being in the "ghetto." One Willis Jepson Middle School student said, "Gangs are there and our house got shot because there was a gang fight outside. But, I do like my neighborhood."

Bike trail safety is a concern for youth in Vacaville. Youth Coalition members often discuss incidents that occur on the bike trails that cause them to feel unsafe. These concerns led to the inclusion on the survey of questions regarding bike trail usage and safety. Survey results conclude that 40% of 7th- and 8th-grade students in Vacaville use a bike trail at least one time per week. Eighteen percent of students who regularly use a bike trail report feeling unsafe on the trail. Although 48% of youth responded that they do not use a bike trail, many of those youth cited concerns over safety as reasons why they do not use a trail. Youth were given the opportunity to provide written comments on the survey regarding bike trail safety. Many youth wrote that they are concerned about being "jumped" on the trails. Youth also reported being concerned about the presence of gangs and drug use on the trails, the frequency of fights on the trails, the possibility of being raped while using the trails, and feeling isolated where there are many hiding places and poorly lit areas on the trails.

***Individual and group discussions with youth found that some youth do not participate in events because they do not have roundtrip transportation, indicating that while they may be able to get to the events, they have no means of transportation home.***

Youth Coalition members often speak of their concern over physical safety in Vacaville. A review of the 2005 TUSD California Healthy Kids Survey shows that on the topic of violence and safety, only 15% of 7th-grade students, 13% of 9th-grade students and 20% of 11th-grade students feel very safe at school. Likewise, a review of the 2006 VUSD CHKS survey shows that only 14% of 7th-grade students, 12% of 9th-grade students and 15% of 11th-grade students feel very safe at school.

Furthermore, a review of crime statistics provided by the Vacaville Police Department show that in 2008, 193 crimes were committed at school and one-quarter mile around Vaca Peña Middle School, and 103 crimes were committed at school and one-quarter mile around Jepson Middle School.

Youth in Vacaville are commonly faced with issues of discrimination. When asked to respond to the question, "I see people being treated negatively because they look different than me or they are of a different race, culture or religion as me," 78% of 7th- and 8th-grade youth indicated they at least sometimes witness discrimination.

### TRANSPORTATION

The City of Vacaville operates a public transportation bus service; however, Youth Coalition members still exhibit frustration when discussing the need for enhanced transportation options for youth in the city. Of the 7th- and 8th-grade students surveyed, 8% stated that they are not able to get where they need to go using public transportation in Vacaville, while 70% of youth said they do not use public transportation.

Individual and group discussions with youth found that some youth do not participate in events because they do not have roundtrip transportation, indicating that while they may be able to get to the events, they have no means of transportation home. Adult coalition members identified similar problems, stating that many organizations that operate events outside public transportation's regular hours do not have the means to transport youth to and from events.

### ENVIRONMENT

When asked if they could do one thing to help the environment, more than 90% of 7th- and 8th-grade youth responded. The most popular responses were to recycle, pick up trash and plant trees. One student's response was, "Clean all the litter on the side of the road and hold a sign saying, 'Please Keep Your Environment Clean.'"

## ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Not all youth in Vacaville have caring adults in their lives to whom they can go when they have a problem at home, at school, in the community or elsewhere. Survey results conclude that while 80% of 7th- and 8th-grade students do have a caring adult they can turn to in a time of need, 10% do not and another 10% do not know if there is a person they can turn to when in need.

Adults responded similarly when asked the same question, with 76% agreeing that youth do have caring adults they can turn to for assistance in time of need, 5% saying they do not and 19% saying they do not know if youth have caring adults they can turn to in time of need.

When asked how adults could do a better job of supporting youth, many youth expressed wanting and needing more positive, meaningful relationships with adults. Responses such as, "Listening to what we have to say and don't ignore us," and "Actually listening to what we have to say and believe that we're not all bad horrible kids," and "Trying to understand us more" were common responses. Additionally, when asked the question, "I am treated like an important person in Vacaville," 55% of youth surveyed said yes and 48% said no. (Some youth said yes in some circumstances and no in other circumstances.)

## Supports and opportunities for Vacaville youth

Youth development experts have identified five core supports and opportunities that youth need to achieve their fullest potential. We found that Vacaville provides a range of these supports and opportunities:

- physical safety
- emotional safety
- relationship building
- community involvement
- youth participation

Vacaville is unique in that the Vacaville Police Department provides limited mental health services to middle school and high school youth through the Youth Services Department. Youth in Vacaville have access to on-site counseling at the two middle schools and at four of the five high schools in the Vacaville Unified School District, and at the middle school and one of the three high schools in the Travis Unified School District. While the counseling is primarily for youth in the juvenile diversion program, school staff have the freedom to refer youth with situational problems who are in crisis to short-term, no-cost counseling at these schools. Counseling services are available in English and Spanish.

Youth in both the Vacaville Unified School District and the Travis Unified School District have multiple and varied opportunities for extracurricular educational and recreational activities. Middle schools and high schools in both districts offer various clubs and sports programs for youth.

Middle school youth in both districts have access to the Prime Time After School Enrichment Program organized by the City of Vacaville's Community Services Department. Youth who attend Prime Time participate in a variety of activities, including homework help programs, cultural arts activities, career exploration activities and more. The program is fee-based and is offered at both of the middle schools in the Vacaville Unified School District and at the middle school in the Travis Unified School District.

The Vacaville Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club is a nonprofit organization that offers low-cost activities for youth up to age 18 at two locations in the city. The club offers assistance with homework, recreational programs and specialized programs that offer age-appropriate education on topics such as substance abuse prevention and gang violence education and prevention programs. The club is designed to support at-risk, low-income youth and families, though all youth are encouraged to attend.

The Vacaville Police Activities League, an organization designed to support at-risk, low-income youth and families, offers free or low-cost recreational and enrichment programs for youth ages 7-18. Vacaville PAL is currently redeveloping its Teen Leadership Council, which will provide Vacaville teens an opportunity to build leadership skills and participate in community service events.

Faith-based organizations throughout Vacaville are host to various youth-centered activities.

The Georgie Duke Sports Center offers drop-in open gym play for youth ages 12 to 17 at a very low cost. A variety of activities are offered for both individual sports and group games.

The City of Vacaville has eight community parks and 25 neighborhood parks. A variety of playing fields, playgrounds and picnic grounds are available for use by youth. However, Youth Coalition members have expressed concern over safety at several of Vacaville's parks. The city also has a public pool, a skate park and bike trails, as well as two public libraries.

## Youth involvement in the coalition

The REACH Youth Coalition members include 50 youth from seven secondary schools (including alternative schools), five elementary schools and three private schools. Many Youth Coalition members represent after-school programs and extracurricular activities such as the Vacaville Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club, Youth Taking on Tobacco, Link Crew and Boy Scouts troops, among others. Many VYRT members have assisted at the weekly meetings.

Youth participated in all aspects of the assessment, from writing the survey questions to distributing the surveys and entering data into the collector. We hired three REACH youth who exemplified leadership abilities in the weekly REACH meetings to specifically assist with the distribution and collection of surveys. In order to apply for and acquire the intern positions, the youth had to complete an application, appear before an interview panel, and pass a background check and drug screen. The REACH youth interns and the REACH Youth Coalition participants are representative of our community, as they are from diverse backgrounds and from both local mainstream and alternative schools.



*My name is Kevin and here's my story. I am a junior at Vacaville High. I am 16 years old. At the start of the school year I got started off on the wrong track. My grades*

*were not the best and my attitude was bad. One day I got into a fight at school and it just went downhill from there. I got put on the diversion program with Officer Jimenez and that's when I realized I had to turn my life around. I got my grades up to all A's and I also got involved with the REACH program which was for community service. I thought I was just going to come and go and be finished but I was wrong. I enjoyed the meetings and met a lot of new people who want to help their community just like me. The REACH program opened up a lot of opportunities for me including the REACH intern position, which is going very well. I plan to stay with REACH for a very long time!*



*I have learned that it's good to give a helping hand. We should help the community. I like REACH because I have friends there and I learn how to help the community.*

-Sadie

*I have learned that youth really do have a voice in the community. I have met a lot of friends. I like being in REACH because I have a lot of friends here.*

-Daisha



*My name is Carlos. I am 16 years old and a junior in high school. Back in my sophomore year I was doing fairly good. But then I started hanging around a bad*

*crowd doing drugs pretty much every day, and doing things that were really wrong, always getting pulled over by the cops and running from them. One night we got into a fight. We ran from the cops and a cop was assaulted. I was charged with hitting him so I got put in juvenile hall for about a week. Then I was put on probation for a year. After that I kind of got the picture to start changing. The beginning of my junior year I was doing good. I started going to drug and alcohol classes at Kaiser. I've been sober for 7 months now and it feels good. Then I met my girlfriend Desiree and now I've got straight A's. You know people told me that I wasn't going to change but look at me. I've been arrested 3 times, hung out with a gang, but that didn't stop me. So there's my story and don't let anyone say you can't do anything because you really don't know what you can do until you've done it.*

## How we did it

The focus of the coalition's community assessment began to emerge at the kick-off event, where the youth were asked to draw and describe their vision for Vacaville in the year 2015. At the first meeting after the event, youth were asked to continue to refine their drawings and to then describe their vision to the group. At each consecutive meeting, the youth narrowed and more clearly defined their vision for Vacaville. Then, the youth discussed the differences between the Vacaville they live in now versus the Vacaville they envision in the year 2015. Several consistent themes emerged.

In the year 2015:

- Youth will have access to parks that are clean, environmentally friendly, free of graffiti and vandalism. They will be available at all times for youth of all ages with facilities and equipment of interest for youth of all ages. (Parks)
- Youth will have more opportunities for career exploration and counseling. (Education)
- Our schools will offer more creative teaching methods, tutoring opportunities, peer counseling opportunities and more classes for English learners. (Education)
- Our community will provide for the safety of all citizens by enhancing safety measures in all areas of the community, including on bike trails and streets, at schools, in parks and outside local business establishments. (Safety)
- Youth will have the opportunity to speak with and be heard by city government officials, school district personnel and law enforcement personnel. (Leadership)
- Youth will have access to enhanced transportation options. (Leadership)
- Youth will have access to more and varied clubs and programs. (Leadership)

From these emerging themes, coalition members were given the task of developing appropriate survey questions for the collection of primary data.

The research and data collection process started with the collection of secondary data from key coalition members. The assistant superintendent of the Vacaville Unified School District provided the California Healthy Kids Survey information, as well as instructions on how to use the California Department of Education's web site to acquire additional statistical information regarding



*Vacaville coalition meeting at Vacaville's City Hall*

schools. A Vacaville Police Department lieutenant provided crime statistics. The Family Resource Center's manager provided information on mental health services available for Vacaville's youth. City of Vacaville Community Development Department staff provided information on after-school and other extracurricular programming for youth. The REACH senior program coordinator, with assistance from Sierra Health Foundation's technical assistance team, researched other demographic information needed to complete this community assessment. Numerous web sites were also used to acquire information useful to this assessment.

Coalition members assisted in creating the survey that was the primary data collection tool for this assessment. The coordinator, with support from a REACH technical assistance team member, led the group during the months of January and February 2009 to develop the survey. After identifying the major areas of concern for youth in Vacaville, the youth got to work on developing the survey. First, they discussed and learned about surveys and the various survey questions such as multiple choice, dichotomous, likert scale, rating, ranking, open-ended and vignettes. In groups, youth created one survey question from each survey question category based on the topics of parks, education, safety and miscellaneous. The adults assisted the groups by providing guidance. Each group then shared their survey questions with the group in order to understand and retain information on the various survey methods.

**Youth discussed the differences between the Vacaville they live in now versus the Vacaville they envision in the year 2015.**

Once the coalition members understood the survey concept, the coalition became a focus group that further defined the areas that would be assessed, including Safety, Leadership, School/Education and Youth Involvement. They completed youth story cards that expressed "Something I Love," "A Problem I See," "How I Want to Move My Community" and "If I Ruled the World." This exercise assisted with narrowing the focus of the survey questions.

Twelve youth and adults then took this information and participated on a survey crew that brainstormed a list of survey questions, refined the final survey, and participated in determining how, when and where to survey youth and adults.

The Vacaville Unified School District approved the survey for use in the schools, so the REACH coalition focused its efforts primarily on collecting surveys directly from middle schools and high schools. However, surveys also were collected from other locations.

The coalition adopted an equity approach to working with youth. Our primary concern is that all youth have equal access to supports and opportunities. We made a concerted effort to outreach to youth who traditionally do not participate in youth activities. The Vacaville Police Department's diversion program and Solano County Probation sent youth to participate in REACH activities in order to complete their community service. Many youth continued participating in REACH even after they completed the community service hours assigned to them through their diversion or probation contracts. We also contacted Solano County Welfare Services Foster Care Program in an attempt to outreach to foster youth.

We translated our survey into Spanish in order to include a greater part of our community. Partnering with the Migrant Education Program and the English Learner Programs in the schools, we were able to outreach to this population of youth and parents.

**The coalition adopted an equity approach to working with youth. Our primary concern is that all youth have equal access to supports and opportunities.**

## What's next?

The process of data collection and initial analysis provided an interesting insight into the concerns and cares of youth in the Vacaville community. The coalition's next steps include:

- » Information collected from students will be used in evaluating the supports and opportunities available for youth in all areas of Vacaville.
- » Data analysis will entail careful consideration of the information provided by the youth in the surveys. Schools, parks, bike trails, youth centers and other places where youth gather will be evaluated to determine what supports and opportunities are not available for youth.
- » The assessment report and progress updates will be presented to community stakeholders at Vacaville Youth Roundtable meetings, city council meetings, police department staff meetings, school staff meetings and other meetings as time and permissions allow.
- » REACH youth will continue to meet regularly to strengthen the bond between existing youth coalition members and to welcome new youth into the group. REACH youth will begin to participate in community events to allow them the opportunity to increase their awareness of the community in which they live and to show the community who and what REACH is and what it means to the community.
- » Focus groups will be held with youth and adults in various sectors of the community to provide REACH youth and adults with a greater understanding of what everyday life is like living in their shoes. One-on-one interviews between youth and community stakeholders will take place.

The survey process was an eye-opening experience and one that allowed youth to anonymously articulate their feelings in a way that will allow their true voices to be heard by the community.

It is our hope as a coalition that the assessment will begin to bridge the gap between youth and adults in the community so that youth/adult partnerships become a reality and the value of youth in the community is appreciated by all of Vacaville's citizens.

*Thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their assistance in conducting and preparing the Community Profile:*

Vacaville Youth Roundtable

Vacaville Community Services Department

Vacaville Unified School District

Travis Unified School District

Vacaville Police Department

Office of the City Manager

Vacaville Police Department Volunteers

Family Resource Center Staff

Bethany Lutheran School

REACH Student Interns

Country High School Student Leadership Class

Vacaville Unified School District School Board

Vacaville Police Department MSW Interns

***Get involved with the Vacaville Youth Roundtable!***

***E-mail: [cdettmer@cityofvacaville.com](mailto:cdettmer@cityofvacaville.com)***

***Phone: (707) 469-6619***

## Vacaville Youth Roundtable REACH Coalition

<b>Alden Borja</b>	Youth	<b>Katherine Jordan</b>	Cultural Diversity Faire, Wells Fargo
<b>Alex Bradley</b>	Youth Taking on Tobacco Intern	<b>Kenzie Wilkinson</b>	Youth
<b>Alexandria Bryan</b>	Youth	<b>Kevin Calkins</b>	Youth
<b>Alexis Hipol-Sorenson</b>	Youth	<b>Kim D'Costa</b>	Youth
<b>Ana Valdez</b>	Youth	<b>Kyle Castro</b>	Youth
<b>Beverly Morlock</b>	Recreation Coord., City of Vacaville	<b>Mark Mazzaferro</b>	City of Vacaville
<b>Brandon Swoopes</b>	Youth	<b>Matt Rounds</b>	Youth
<b>Brenna Denno</b>	Youth	<b>Michael McPeak</b>	Youth
<b>Brett Scarlett</b>	Youth	<b>Monica Lopez</b>	Youth
<b>Brie McDowell</b>	Youth	<b>Montoya Graham</b>	Vacaville Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club
<b>Brittany Blais</b>	Youth	<b>Nancy Lichauco</b>	Vacaville Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club
<b>Carlos Barajas</b>	Youth	<b>Patrick Jones</b>	Youth
<b>Carolyn Douglas</b>	Solano Pride Center	<b>Reggie Hubbard</b>	Community Services Recreation Manager, City of Vacaville
<b>Carolyn Fine</b>	Youth	<b>Renisha Clay</b>	Youth
<b>Carrie Dettmer</b>	Vacaville Police Department	<b>Richetta Hughes</b>	Youth
<b>Catalina Correa</b>	Youth	<b>Riley Tokiwa</b>	Youth
<b>Cody Brock</b>	Youth	<b>Robbie Kunde</b>	Youth
<b>Curtis Hunt</b>	Vice Mayor, City of Vacaville	<b>Rosanne Valenzuela</b>	Youth
<b>Daisha McCulloch-Soto</b>	Youth	<b>Sadie Perez</b>	Youth
<b>Danielle Caredio</b>	Youth	<b>Sarah Watson</b>	Youth
<b>Danielle Waters</b>	Recreation Coord., City of Vacaville	<b>Scott Schwerdtfeger</b>	Youth
<b>Debbie McGuire</b>	Vacaville Unified School District	<b>Sean Frankel</b>	Youth
<b>Derek Perez</b>	Youth	<b>Sean Marshall</b>	Youth
<b>Devin Murphy</b>	Youth	<b>Shereene Wilkerson</b>	Asst. Superintendent, Vacaville Unified School District
<b>Drew Brunet</b>	Police Activities League, City of Vacaville	<b>Sherilyn Henry</b>	Unity Church, Peace Jam
<b>Gabe Torres</b>	Youth	<b>Shiela Zeda</b>	Alpha Pregnancy Center
<b>Gabriella Silva</b>	Youth	<b>Simi Gill</b>	Youth
<b>Gary Kimsey</b>	Vacaville Unified School District	<b>Stephanie Bertholdi</b>	Youth
<b>Gloria Diaz</b>	Vacaville Police Department/ Family Resource Center	<b>Tammy Buntman</b>	Youth
<b>Heather Prusak</b>	Youth	<b>Taylor Stamm</b>	Youth
<b>Hege Fan</b>	Big Brothers, Big Sisters of the North Bay	<b>Tim May</b>	Pastor/President, Vacaville Christian Ministerial Association
<b>Ivonne Vaughn</b>	ATOD Coordinator, Vacaville Police Department	<b>Travis Strah</b>	Youth
<b>Jalen Soto</b>	Youth	<b>Wanda Barkhurst</b>	Vacaville Noon Rotary
<b>Jered Ramsey</b>	Youth	<b>Willie Graham</b>	Pastor, Christian Body Life Church
<b>Jeris Mickens</b>	Youth	<b>Zach Hansler</b>	Youth
<b>Jessie Alexander</b>	Youth	<b>Zack Sperow</b>	Youth
<b>John Wilkerson</b>	Coordinator, Youth Taking on Tobacco		
<b>Josh Mack</b>	Youth		