

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Issue 4 • June 2020



## Connecting During Times of Change

Since March, social distancing and sheltering in place became our new normal. We led virtual Zoom meetings, expanded services in new ways, delivered food drives, distributed overdose rescue kits, sewed masks and more. It is an amazing accomplishment which highlights our resiliency as a community. We have been impacted not only by the reality of COVID-19, but also by the recent racial protests in our country.

This newsletter is one of our ways to stay engaged during these changing times. Talking about substance use and mental health issues is especially important and we want to help link people to prevention and treatment resources. Outreach can offer a way for someone to open a door and find a pathway to support.

Our team and our partners share their insights and stories with us. We plan on featuring you and your agencies in this newsletter so we all get to know you better.

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## Featured Agency: One Step A La Vez

The mission of One Step A La Vez is to serve the communities of the

Santa Clara Valley  
by providing a safe  
environment for 13-  
19 year olds and  
preparing  
informed,  
empowered youth  
who are equipped  
with the tools to lead, cultivate cultural awareness, bridge the  
gaps of inequality, and advocate for fair, just and healthy  
individuals and community.



During this time, we continued to serve the community in the following ways:

### **Digital Pivoting**

After closing our physical doors to the teens in March, we moved our youth programming to digital platforms. We have offered psychoeducation, sex education and free counseling, thanks to our community partners such as Coalition for Family Harmony. Our staff provides texts and phone calls to our nearly 200 youth members weekly. Staff have attended trainings on trauma informed care, LGBTQ cultural competency and training in drug and alcohol recovery programming for teens.

### **Hands On / Gloves & Masks On**

We have been delivering hot meals to the teens homes every Thursday. Our community food pantry has more than doubled its usual number of families needing assistance. We are grateful to our staff and volunteers for making sure this needed pantry could continue.

### **Outreach & Raising Youth Voices**

Through the “Conocimiento” program we provided more parent outreach than ever before while providing case management support for families and COVID-19 safety information. We continue to raise issues of disparity that affect our youth and community, reach out to county partners, and encourage youth to step into leadership roles.

Kate English, Executive Director

Learn more:

[www.onestepalavez.org](http://www.onestepalavez.org)

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## **Message from Alma: The Importance of Family**

This pandemic helped me reflect about many things that are important in my life. My priority is my family and I

believe it's the same for many of us in our community.

As we were mandated to stay home, the important thing that got me through this isolation was my family. But there are many people who were alone, with no family nearby. The difference between me being able to be surrounded by my family and be somewhat safe and happy was not the reality for others. Loneliness and isolation may have a profound impact on one's mental health and or sobriety. Friends and family helped me during this time, but I can only imagine the people that were lonely with no real support system.



With the type of work we do in the community with collaborating community agencies, it made me realize that we have a lot of work ahead of us. We need to help our vulnerable populations and our most needy families get back on their feet. We can use our prevention efforts to educate and work together to help our community become a healthier one.

Sharing my home with my family and my four grandchildren can be a challenge if I choose to see it from a negative perspective, but if I see things from a different lens I can say that it has been a blessing. We have spent more time together, sharing meals and family game nights, all the things that in the past we only wished we had more time for. I got to know my grandchildren in a deeper way, and I'm sad to say that even though we live in the same house, I didn't know what their favorite color or movie was prior to COVID-19. So, as I've always said, when something bad happens, something good comes out of it.

*Photo: Alma Ixta and Erika Fernandez, Community Services Coordinators at work.*

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## Message from Erika: The Power of Outreach

When I was in my junior year in high school, I had the opportunity to meet a community outreach specialist for a program that helped first-generation students get into college. She educated students at my high school on how to get into college. Even though this might sound like something simple, as a first-generation Mexican-American 16-year old girl raised in a low-income neighborhood, the process was scary and complicated. My plan was to go to college at some point in my life because my parents would always remind me how they sacrificed their lives to

give me a better future. I just didn't know how and when.

The outreach specialist had presentations on how to apply for college, register for the SAT, get help to pay for college, and fill out the FAFSA application. She offered to help students take college prep courses and fill out college applications. She gave me resources and helped me apply to several different universities.

I was accepted to three universities and four years later I graduated with a B.A. in Psychology and a B.A. in Sociology from CSU Channel Islands. Without her outreach support I would not have accomplished one my biggest goals.

I am a strong believer that through education we can engage individuals towards a healthier community. Many individuals lack knowledge of the available resources offered in the community and/or lack access to transportation and technology. Our community outreach efforts are essential for families to get access to food, housing, health screenings, substance use and mental health treatment services, education and employment and many other resources. Engaging in a conversation, participating in local events, providing educational presentations, and working for local policy change can help in reaching out to our community. Without knowing it you can make a life change in someone's life.

I know many of us are struggling right now, trying to figure out how to connect and help in the community. With all the COVID-19 precautions and restrictions it makes it hard for us to connect with individuals and provide the needed resources, however our community needs us now more than ever.

A little goes a long way, especially in times of uncertainty.

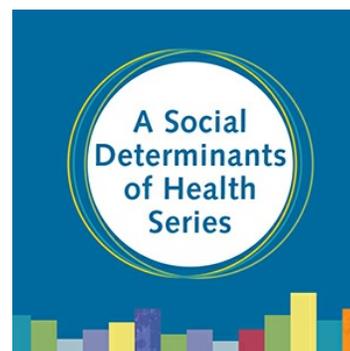
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## Featured Website: Social Determinants of Health

*"Determinants of equity are defined as the social, economic, geographic, political, and physical environmental conditions that lead to the creation of a fair and just society."*

- California Department of Public Health

Health equity is achieved when everyone has the opportunity to live a healthier life, no matter who we are, where we live, or how much money we make. And while we can't currently ensure that everyone will be healthy, we can change the physical conditions in which people live, learn, work and play, one community at a time. These conditions are called the Social Determinants of Health and by improving these conditions we can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full



potential and improve their quality of life.

Learn more:

Social Determinants of Health website

[www.healthequityvc.org](http://www.healthequityvc.org)

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## Stay Connected

If you are looking for resources in the community, please check out these websites. There are more resources available in Ventura County than most people realize. We continually add news updates, campaigns, publications and more, so check back regularly.

Ventura County Behavioral Health

[www.vcbh.org](http://www.vcbh.org)

Building Healthy Habits - How are we coping?

[habits.vcbh.org](http://habits.vcbh.org)

[habititos.vcbh.org](http://habititos.vcbh.org)

Ventura County Coronavirus Information

[www.vcemergency.com](http://www.vcemergency.com)

Substance Use Resources

[vcbh.org/en/information-resources/substance-use-resources](http://vcbh.org/en/information-resources/substance-use-resources)

Ventura County Human Services Agency

[www.ventura.org/human-services-agency](http://www.ventura.org/human-services-agency)

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## Upcoming Events

We will keep you posted on upcoming events, trainings and meetings in each Newsletter. If your agency is planning any type of online meetings, please send to us so we can post this.

Health & Wealth: Using Data to Address Income Inequality

Webinar, June 16, 12:00 pm

[Register here](#)

COVID-19: Disproportionate Impact on Black Communities

Webinar, June 25, 12:00 pm

[Register here](#)

Sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

BRITE: Weekly Youth Advocacy & Leadership Sessions

[Learn more about BRITE](#)

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# Share your Photos

Send us photos of Ventura County scenes (be sure to get permission if people's faces are in the images) and we'll share in future newsletters. As the county opens up more businesses, we want to capture the changing landscape of our communities.

*Photos by Alma Ixta, Janet Kaplan*

*Smart & Final, Government Center, Trader Joes, Peet's Coffee, Oxnard Beach*



## Contact Us

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STAY CONNECTED



