



YOUTH VOICES FOR CHANGE

opinions & ideas for
the future of West Sacramento

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CHECK IT
OUT!

PREFACE

Listening to young people voice their cares and concerns is a potentially effective yet often overlooked process in strengthening communities. Young people, with their eyes and ears to the ground, have an enormous potential to shed light on many long-standing, pressing issues such as impoverishment, low educational achievement and gangs facing many communities throughout California.

Working with a multi-racial coalition of youth in West Sacramento, a community beset by similar concerns, Youth Voices for Change has demonstrated that by providing young people the tools, training and spaces to articulate their perspectives and visions for a better tomorrow, communities can go a long way in identifying the core issues impacting young people and the community in general. Moreover, Youth Voices for Change has found that by involving youth as problem solvers in their community and listening to their concerns, young people become increasingly invested in their environments and build pride and respect for their larger surroundings. Whether youth are involved in cleaning up and beautifying a senior citizen center or are integral to identifying meaningful as well as depressing blots on their community, they can make a significant difference in motivating their peers and their older counterparts as well as their political representatives to take action to protect and improve their surroundings.

Tapping into the young people's sense of "what works" and "what doesn't work" for them and their community is also a strategic approach of Youth Voices for Change because it allows youth to communicate the best methods for attracting and maintaining young people's interest and commitment to their community. Often the biggest barrier to getting youth involved and cultivating a sense of belonging is simply not knowing how to approach them and not knowing what makes them tick. Yet, as most of us realize, integrating youth and seeing the community through their eyes is only the beginning in bringing about structural change that will, ultimately, bring about material and ideological change in their everyday lives, whether in school, at home or at play. It is these goals Youth Voices for Change has adopted in carrying out this project with young people in West Sacramento.

Miroslava Chavez-Garcia
Associate Professor, UC Davis



INTRODUCTION

The Sactown Heroes, a youth group in West Sacramento, participated in the Youth Voices for Change project. During this effort, they identified places in their community that they like and don't like with the hope that their opinions will inform city leaders as they make decisions. The youth have included a summary of those places here, along with recommendations of four areas where they think community policies could have a big impact on the youth experience of West Sacramento. This comic book is intended as a starting point for future discussions with the community's youth. It represents the views of the small group involved in this effort and doesn't speak for all the youth of West Sacramento.

In early 2009, the Heroes began working with a group of UC Davis researchers to understand and document what they think about growing up in West Sacramento. At weekly meetings, youth discussed things in the community that they thought were helpful and supportive for young people and the places that they like. Youth also talked about those things that aren't so good and that they would like to change. With the intent of sharing their opinions with others, the Sactown Heroes took their UC Davis partners to places around the community where they took photographs and made videos. The Heroes produced a Google map of their ideas and hosted a public project exhibit and idea exchange at the West Sacramento City Hall in June 2009.

Sactown Heroes is the youth component of the West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition, a group of concerned community members seeking to provide a safe place for youth and families, foster healthy development and opportunities, and support youth in realizing their potential. The Coalition receives funding from Sierra Health Foundation. The Heroes participating in the Youth Voices for Change community mapping project ranged in age from 11 - 19. They live in many different neighborhoods--Bryte, Broderick, Southport--and attend many of the schools in West Sacramento. This comic book shares the Heroes' images, opinions and ideas for change in their community.



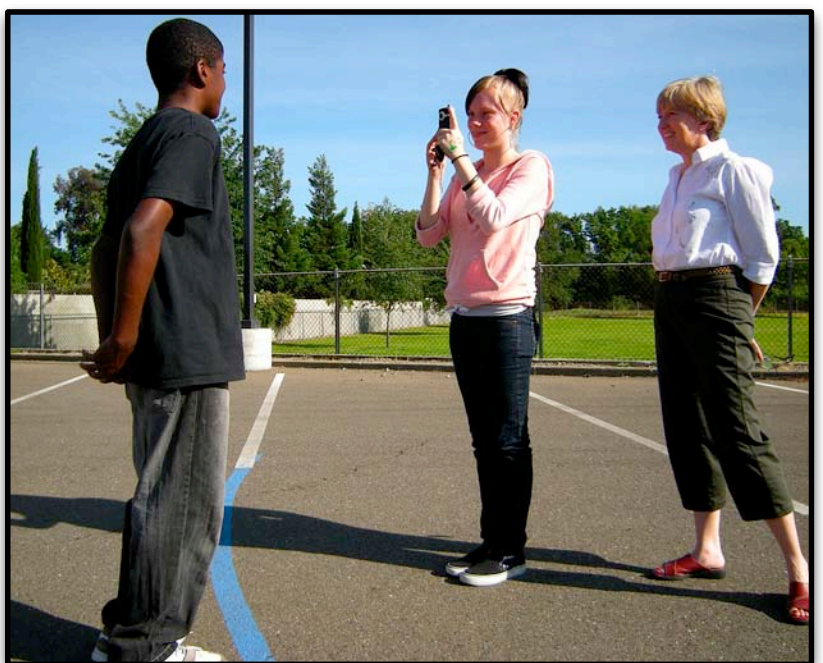
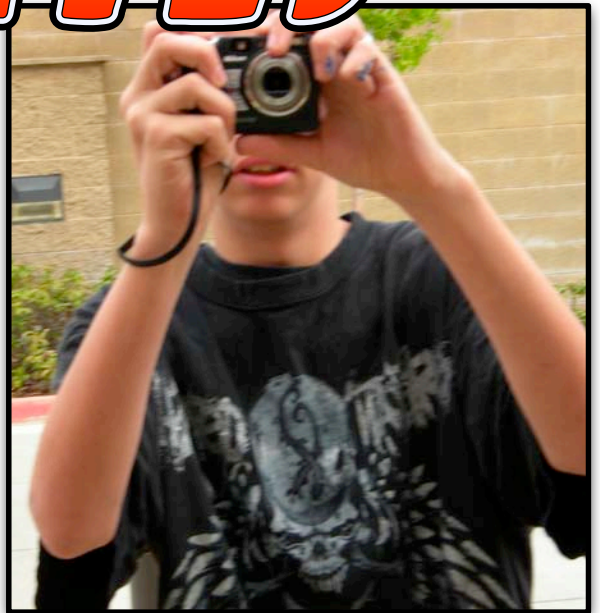
FOOTNOTE:
Throughout the book...

BUBBLES ARE
ALL WRITTEN
BY YOUTH

CAPTIONS ARE ALL WRITTEN
BY ADULT PARTNERS WITH
YOUTH INPUT.



FAVORITES

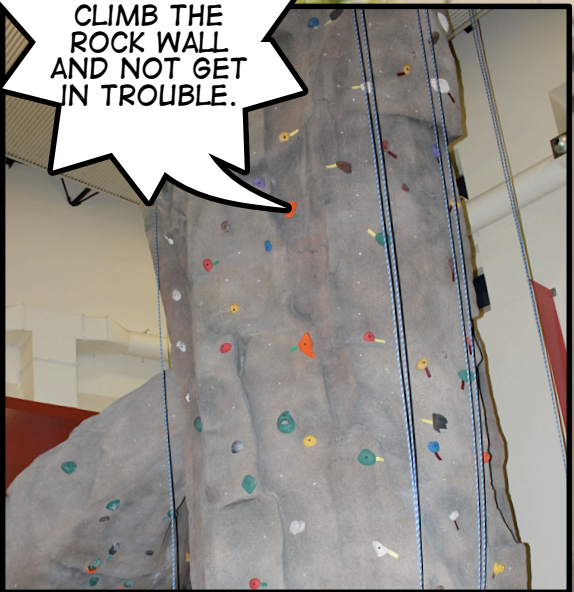




SOME PEOPLE
LIKE TO GO TO
THE REC GYM
AND BE FIT.
IT'S CHEEEP!

THE REC CENTER PROVIDES A PLACE
TO GET EXERCISE & HAVE FUN. IT'S
LOCATED ON THE RIVER CITY HIGH
SCHOOL CAMPUS SO IT'S VERY
CONVENIENT FOR OLDER TEENS.

YOU CAN
CLIMB THE
ROCK WALL
AND NOT GET
IN TROUBLE.



THE REC CENTER HAS
A LOT OF FUN
THINGS TO DO!



WE WANT A
HEALTHY, CLEAN
POOL. SO LET'S
MAINTAIN IT!

WEST SACRAMENTO
RECREATION CENTER

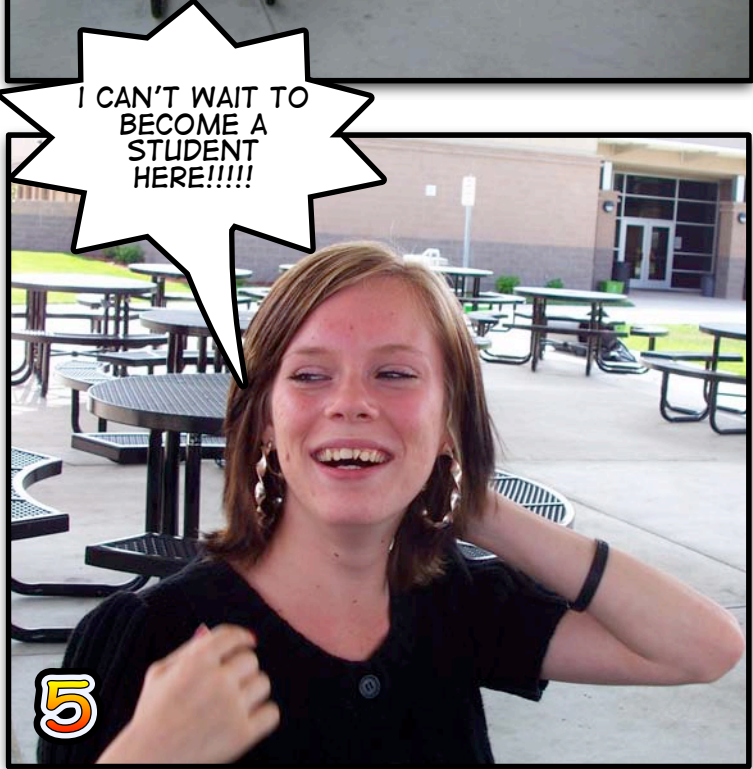


MANY YOUTH LIKE SEEING THEIR FRIENDS AT SCHOOL, BUT THEY ALSO WANT TO LEARN AND BE PREPARED FOR CAREERS AND COLLEGE.

HERE WE HAVE A LOT OF SPACE. WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN PLACE TO HANG OUT!!



A PLACE WE CAN HAVE OUR LUNCH, ENJOYING THE FRESH AIR.



I CAN'T WAIT TO BECOME A STUDENT HERE!!!!



THE NEW RIVER CITY HIGH SCHOOL IS REALLY NICE AND THE STUDENTS ARE FRIENDLY.

STORES GIVE YOUTH A SAFE AND COMFORTABLE PLACE TO WALK AROUND WITH FRIENDS OR JUST HANG OUT.

YOU CAN DO YOUR GROCERY AND CLOTHING SHOPPING ALL AT ONCE.



WHENEVER I NEED SOMETHING I GO TO TARGET. ALSO, MY FRIENDS HANG OUT THERE.



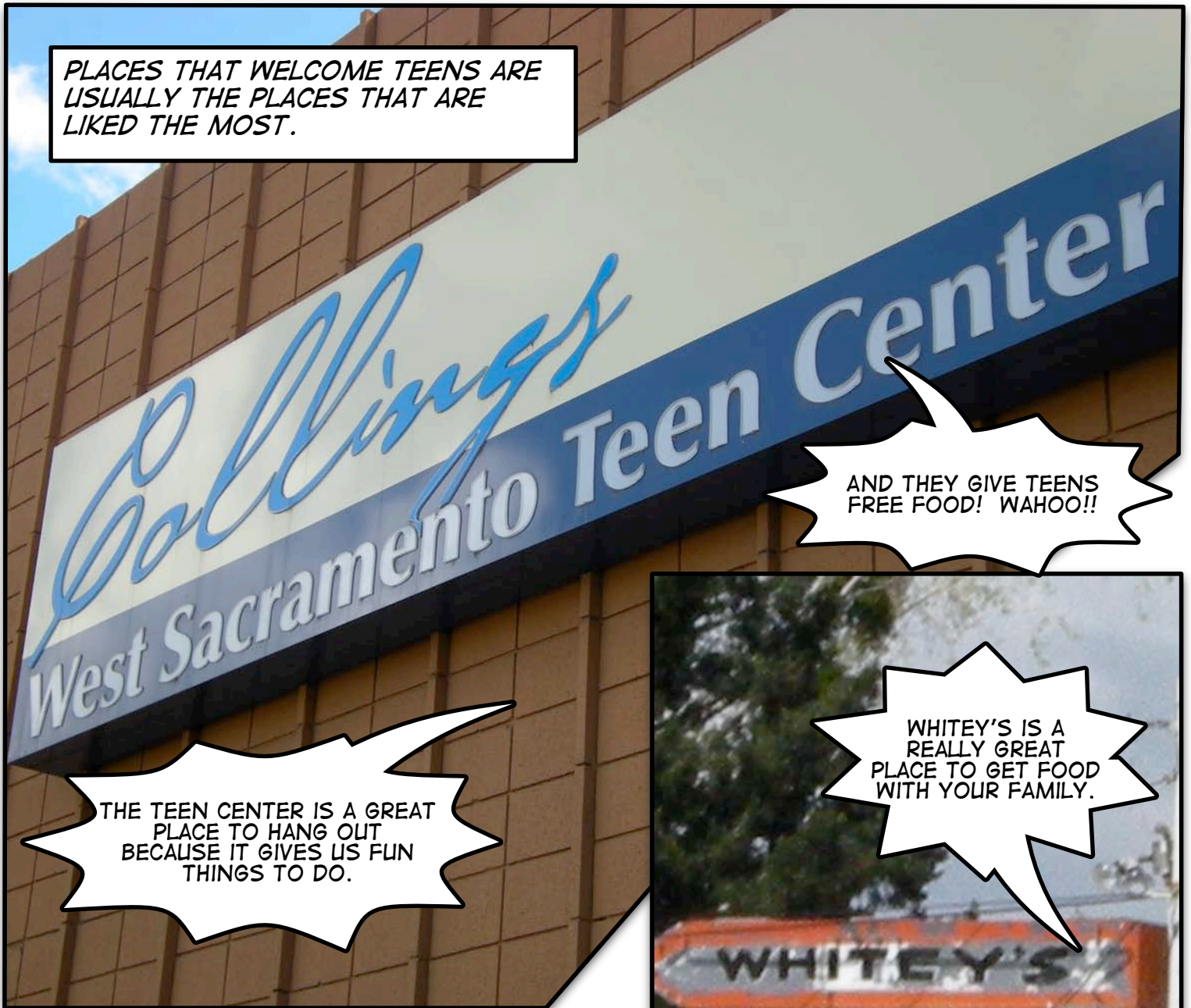
A LOT OF PEOPLE GO SHOPPING HERE.



LITTLE CAESARS HAS YOUTH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

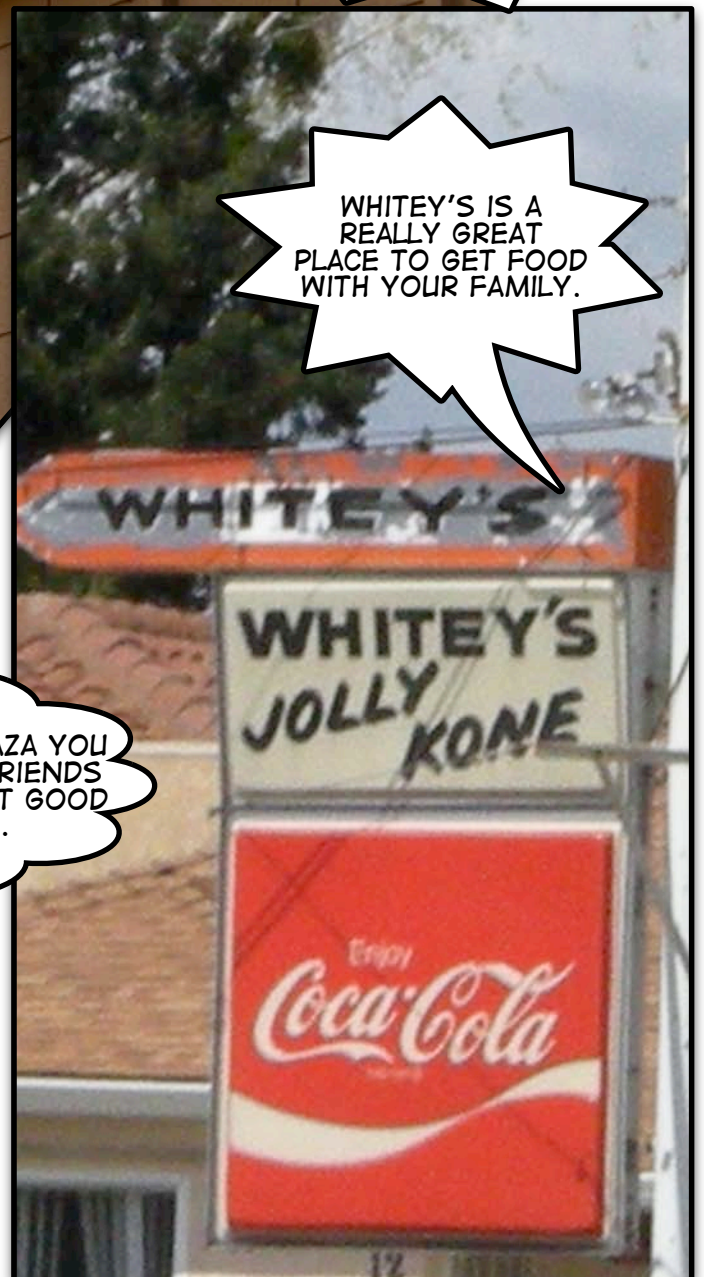


PLACES THAT WELCOME TEENS ARE
USUALLY THE PLACES THAT ARE
LIKED THE MOST.



AND THEY GIVE TEENS
FREE FOOD! WAHOO!!

THE TEEN CENTER IS A GREAT
PLACE TO HANG OUT
BECAUSE IT GIVES US FUN
THINGS TO DO.



WHITEY'S IS A
REALLY GREAT
PLACE TO GET FOOD
WITH YOUR FAMILY.



AT THE TOWN CENTER PLAZA YOU
CAN SIT WITH ALL YOUR FRIENDS
AND CONVERSATE AND EAT GOOD
FOOD AND FRO-YO.



WE COME OFTEN TO
GO FISHING OVER
HERE AT THE PORT.
IT'S PRETTY GOOD.

PEOPLE CAN COME OUT
HERE AND HAVE FUN
FISHING. THE WATER IS
FILLED WITH BASS
& BLUE GILL.

THERE ARE MANY PLACES TO FISH IN
WEST SAC. SOME PEOPLE THINK THE FISH
AREN'T VERY HEALTHY FROM THESE
WATERS BUT JUST BEING AT THE RIVER
WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS IS IMPORTANT.

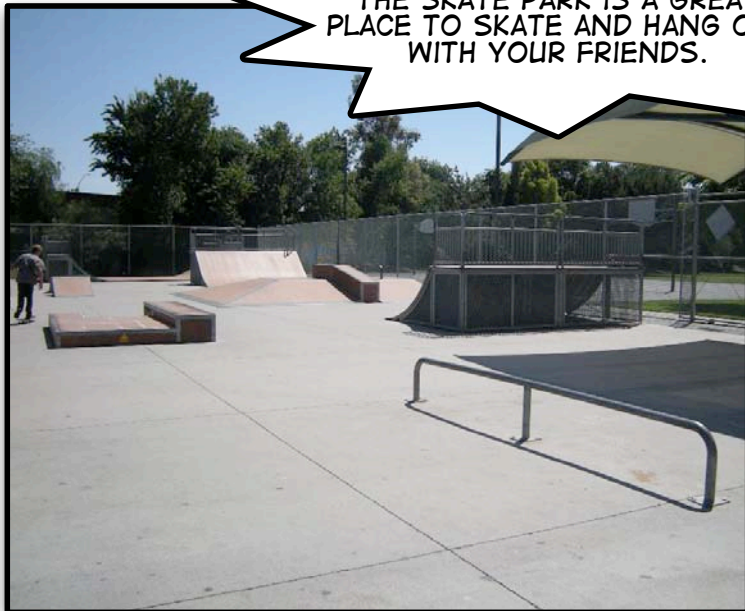


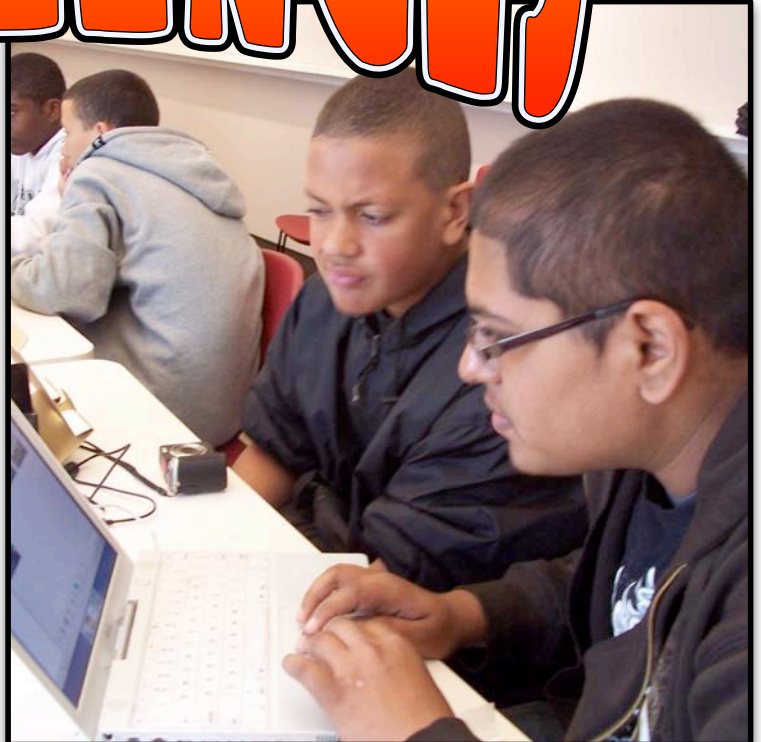
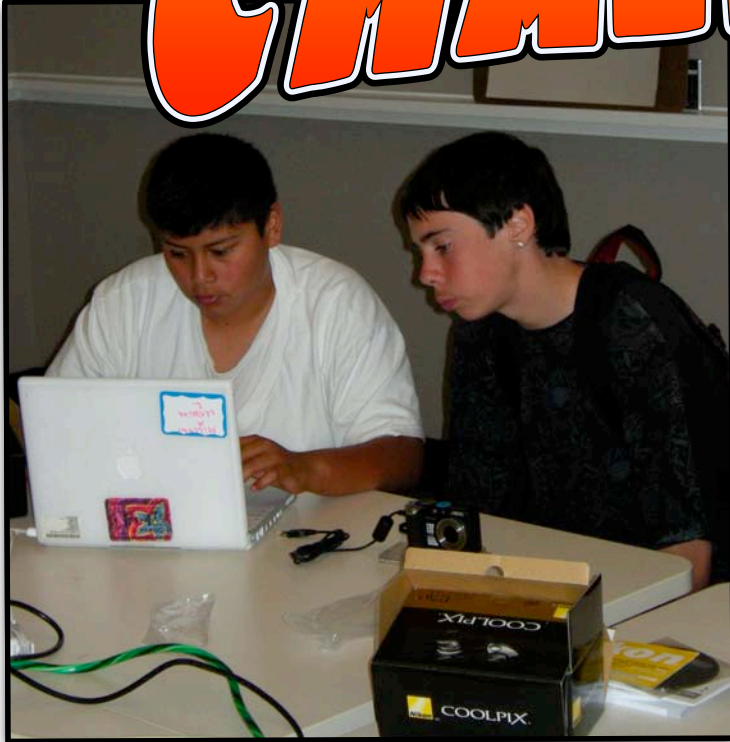
THIS IS A SPECIAL,
OUT OF THE WAY
AREA OFF RIVER ROAD
TO GO FISHING WITH
MY OLDER BROTHER.



NOT ALL TEENS SKATEBOARD, BUT
SOME HAVE GREAT MEMORIES OF THE
SKATEPARK. YOUTH ALSO REALIZE THAT
SOME TEENS DO THINGS THAT THEY
SHOULDN'T AT THE SKATEPARK.

THE SKATE PARK IS A GREAT
PLACE TO SKATE AND HANG OUT
WITH YOUR FRIENDS.








GUYS!!! THERE ARE
SCARY HOMELESS
PEOPLE OVER HERE.
RUN!!



SOME PLACES ALONG THE RIVER
FEEL VERY DANGEROUS.

THE BOATRAMP
IS DIRTY &
GROSS AND
THE WATER IS
FILTHY.



PSHH!
NO ONE PAYS
ATTENTION TO THE
SIGNS.



DANGER
NO SWIMMING
UNDERWATER
HAZARDS



NO DON'T
SWIM, IT'S
DANGEROUS!

SOME YOUTH THINK SELECTED STUDENTS ARE TREATED UNFAIRLY AND THEY DON'T LIKE THE LUNCHES. ALSO, MANY YOUTH THINK THE COMMUNITY HAS A NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF THE YOLO HIGH SCHOOL.

THIS LUNCH IS GROSS.



WE NEED MORE EDUCATION AND LESS WORRYING ABOUT HOW BAD THE KIDS ARE.



DISCIPLINE ISN'T FAIR. TEACHERS OFTEN OVERREACT.





MCDONALD'S HAS TASTY BUT GREASY FOOD!

THERE ARE MANY FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS AROUND---YOUTH NEED MORE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES, TOO!



EAT THEM!



EAT THEM SOMETIMES.



IT'S BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH AND YOUR BODY.

SIGNS OF HOMELESSNESS AND VANDALISM MAKE YOUTH CONCERNED.

I SEE GRAFFITI, SLEEPING BAGS AND HOMELESS PEOPLE IN THE 8TH STREET ALLEY.



THE BIKE LANE ON JEFFERSON BLVD MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO GET HIT BY A TRUCK!

IT CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET AROUND WEST SACRAMENTO.

LINKEMPT PLACES AND PLACES WHERE ALCOHOL AND CIGARETTES ARE SOLD MAKE SOME YOUTH FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.

MOST OF THE TIME IT'S REALLY DIRTY AND UNORGANIZED.



SMOKING IS A NO, NO!



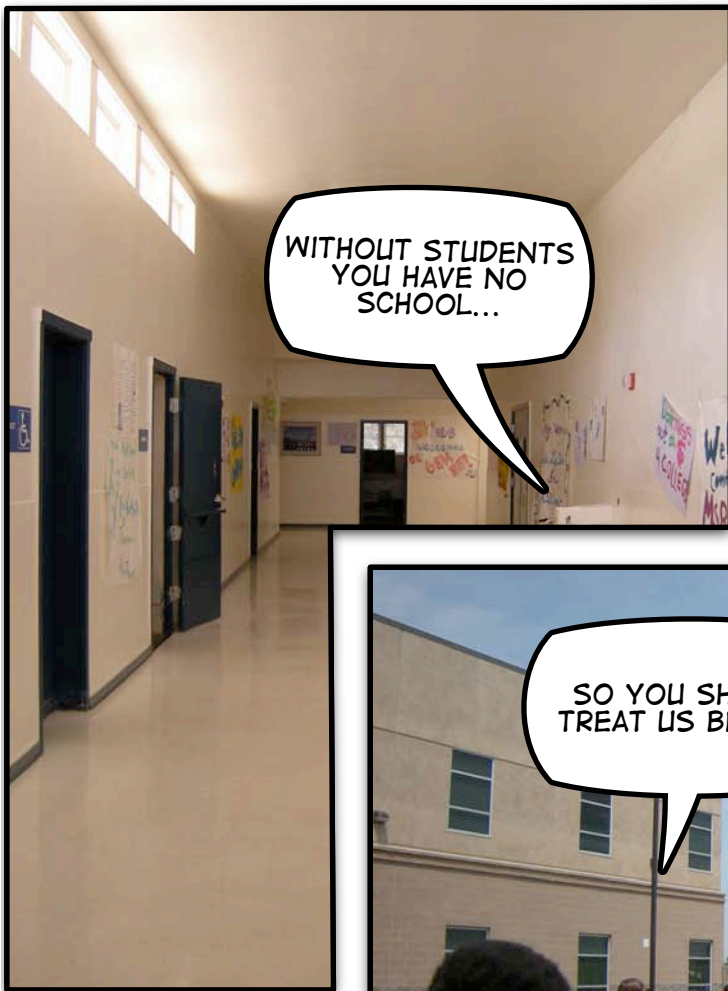
THEY SELL CIGARETTES. IT'S PRETTY DIRTY; IT'S ALSO SMALL.

ADJUSTMENTS



15

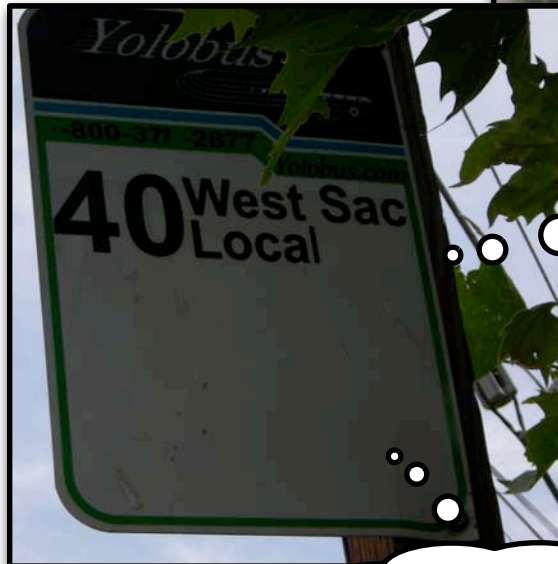




GETTING AROUND THE COMMUNITY CAN BE DIFFICULT -- SOMETIMES YOUTH CAN'T GET TO THE PLACES THEY NEED TO GO TO.



WE NEED BUSES TO GO MORE PLACES MORE OFTEN.



STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO USE TRANSFERS ON RT BUSES.

BUSES NEED TO BE CHEAPER FOR STUDENTS!



YOUTH NEED HELP GETTING PREPARED FOR JOBS -- CLASSES IN SCHOOL AND PART-TIME WORK WOULD BE GOOD.



BUSINESSES SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO HIRE YOUTH.

THERE ARE MANY PARKS IN
WEST SACRAMENTO, BUT
THERE'S NOT MUCH FOR TEENS
TO DO AT THEM.



Bryte Park

A cooperative use playfield

Washington Unified School District & City

WE NEED ACTIVITIES
FOR DIFFERENT AGES
AT THE PARKS.

BIGGER SWINGS FOR
OLDER YOUTH AND ADULTS
WOULD BE FUN.



THE WATER PLAY AT
BRIDGEWAY IS GREAT. LET'S
ADD THE SAME AT MORE
PARKS AROUND TOWN!



GRAFFITI AND TRASH ARE TWO THINGS AROUND THE COMMUNITY THAT MAKE TEENS THINK THAT PEOPLE DON'T CARE.

I WANT MY NEIGHBORHOOD TO BE CLEANER & SAFER!

CHILD SAFE Zone



Please NO alcohol.
NO smoking.
NO foul language.
Keep pets on a leash
and pick up after them.

City of West Sacramento
Parks and Recreation

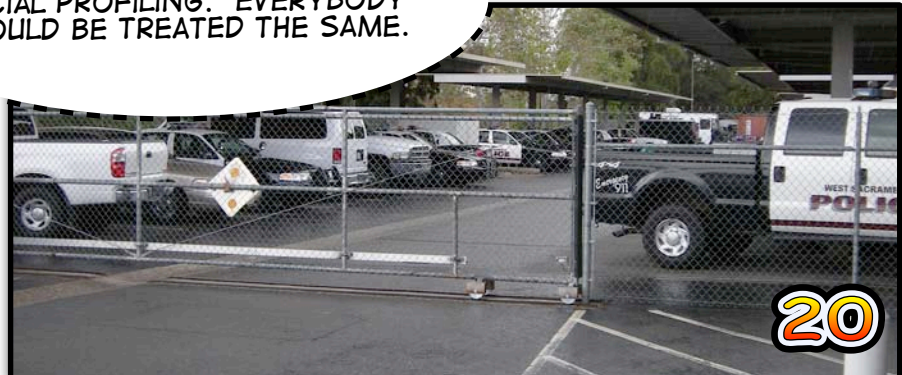
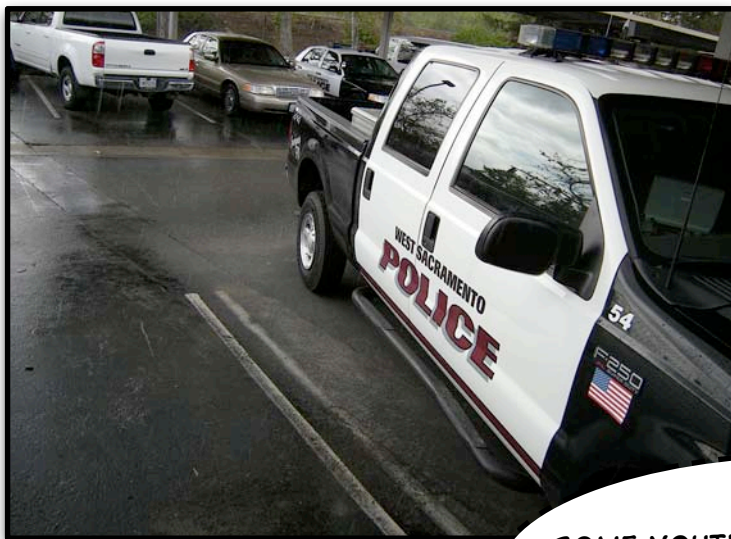
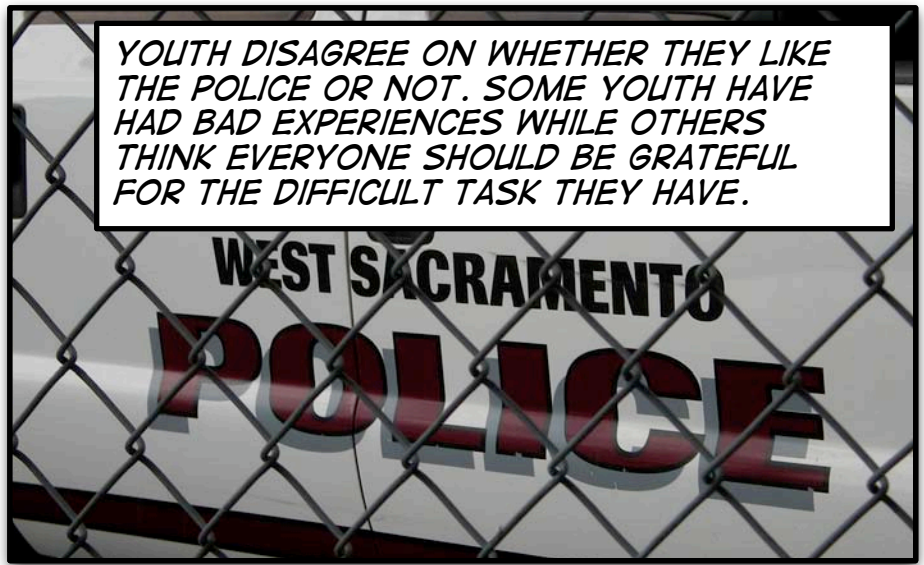
PEOPLE NEED TO DO A BETTER JOB TO KEEP EVERGREEN PARK CLEAN!!

THERE'S TOO MUCH TRASH AROUND THE CITY THAT PEOPLE DON'T PICK UP.

...AND THERE IS GRAFFITI EVERYWHERE.

THEY SHOULD MAKE A PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO DO GRAFFITI!

GRAFFITI IS A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS. THEY SHOULD PROVIDE A LEGAL PLACE TO DO GRAFFITI.



TEENS LIKE TO BE ACTIVE AND HAVE THINGS TO DO. THEY LIKE PLACES AND EVENTS WHERE THEY CAN BE WITH FRIENDS, BUT ALSO WHERE THEY CAN BE WITH THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.

WE WANT THE COLLINGS TEEN CENTER TO BE OPEN IN THE SUMMER.



WE MISS THE 4TH OF JULY BRIDGEFEST. BRING IT BACK!

I WISH WE HAD MORE COMMUNITY AND FAMILY EVENTS.

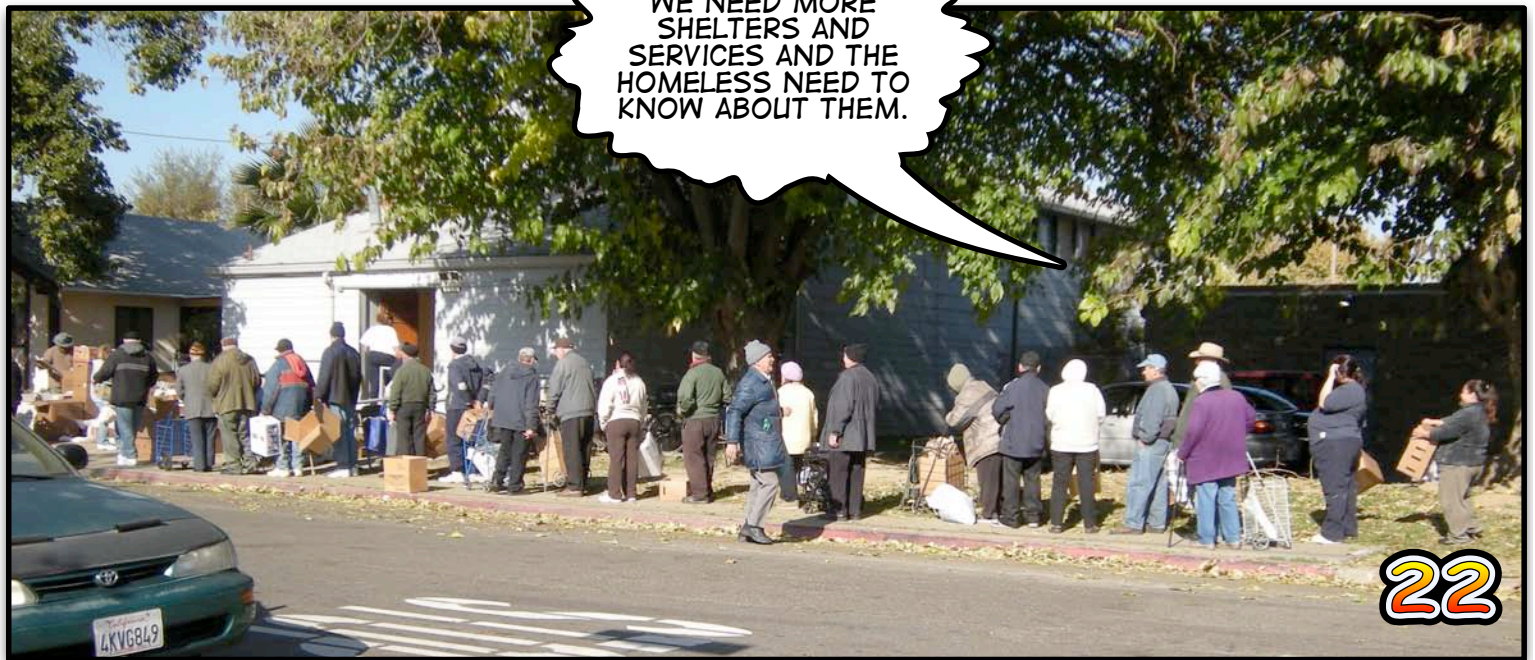
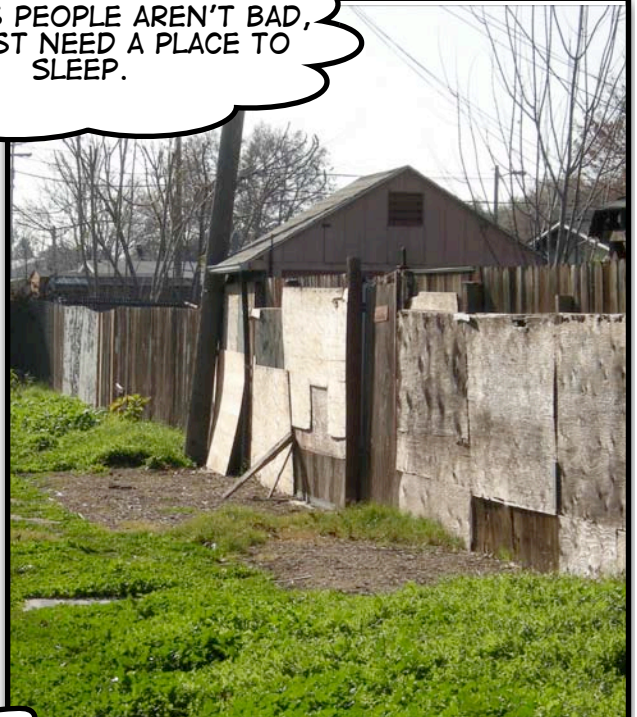




YOUNG PEOPLE EXPRESS A GREAT DEAL OF CONCERN FOR THE LESS FORTUNATE IN THE COMMUNITY AND THINK THAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO HELP.

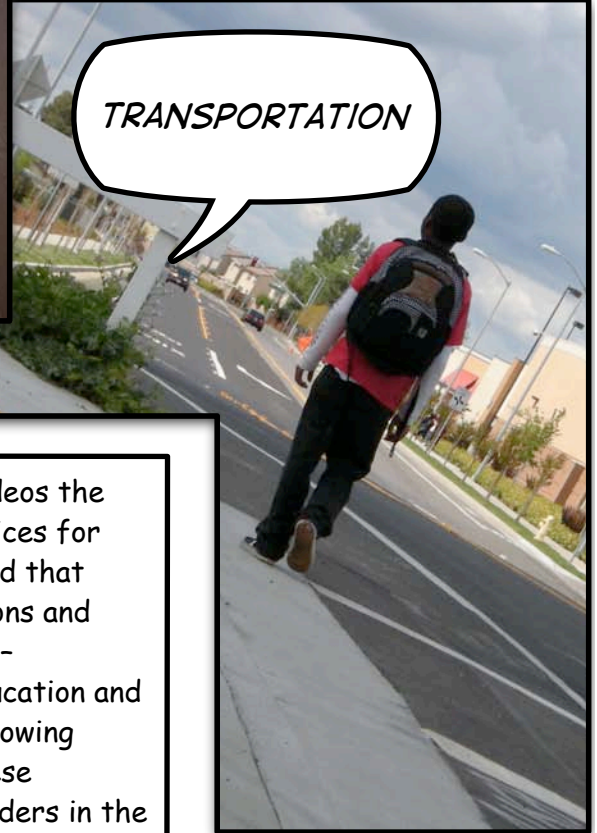


HOMELESS PEOPLE AREN'T BAD, THEY JUST NEED A PLACE TO SLEEP.

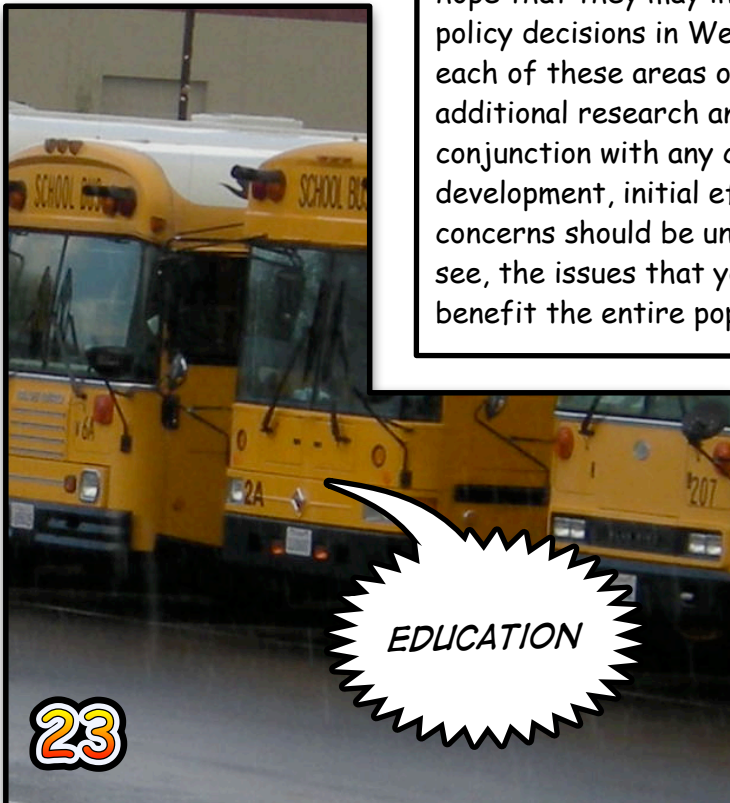


WE NEED MORE SHELTERS AND SERVICES AND THE HOMELESS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEM.

RECOMMENDATIONS



In reviewing the photographs and videos the Heroes created during the Youth Voices for Change project, four themes emerged that capture the majority of teens' opinions and ideas for the future. These themes - transportation, community pride, education and recreation - are discussed in the following pages. The youth intend to share these opinions and ideas with their City leaders in the hope that they may inspire future planning and policy decisions in West Sacramento. Although each of these areas of concern warrant additional research and community input in conjunction with any comprehensive proposal development, initial efforts to address these concerns should be undertaken. As you will see, the issues that youth have identified will benefit the entire population of the City.



TRANSPORTATION

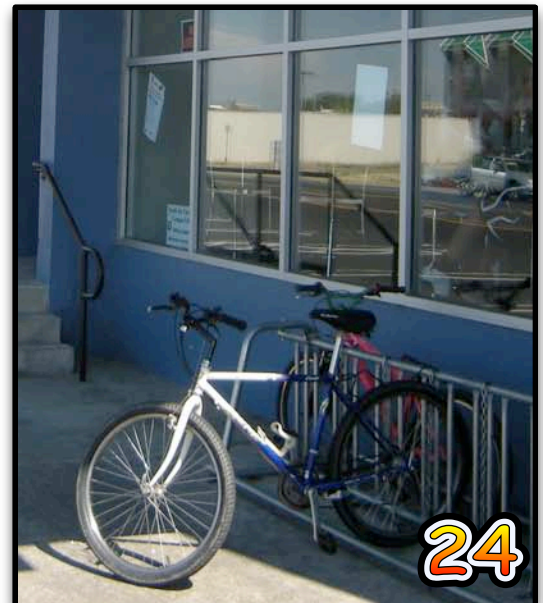


The teen years represent a time of increased independence and mobility for most youth. The stories of the Sactown Heroes illustrate some of the issues that youth face as they embark on navigating this new freedom and responsibility. These issues include their concerns regarding convenience and availability of transportation options, the safety of routes and modes of travel, and the quality of their experience. Growing up in West Sacramento often means that youth rely on public transportation, bicycles or walking to get around the community. Therefore their comments tend to focus on these modes of travel.

Many Heroes described their frustration with a lack of transportation options, particularly public buses. The bus system provides adequate coverage to many of the places youth want to go, but the schedules provide only hourly or peak-time service. The youth often have a tight schedule to get from school to another activity, and if the bus schedule doesn't align with theirs, they have to find another means to get there. In addition, if a transfer between buses is required, the time to get somewhere is even greater. The cost to ride the bus also makes it prohibitive for many youth.

When talking about their experiences in getting around West Sacramento, safety was a prominent concern. For many elementary and junior high students, riding a bicycle or skateboarding is a typical way to get around. Youth have to ride along existing roadways and often this means sharing the road with large trucks and fast traffic. This experience is very intimidating and potentially dangerous. Youth think a bicycle lane or pedestrian path network that would link neighborhoods with the schools, parks and shopping areas would benefit young people as well as other residents.

Lastly, the quality of their transportation experience was important to the youth. Whether describing their long wait for a bus, bicycling on city streets or walking in their neighborhoods, the Heroes voiced a desire to enjoy their experience. For many of the youth, walking in West Sacramento can be an unpleasant experience. When bicycling, they often travel along the same routes as the cars and don't like the noise and fumes. In addition, the sidewalks are frequently in disrepair, narrow or missing. Since taking the bus can take a long time and bicycling can be dangerous, youth often walk great distances. A pedestrian system to link where people live to where they want to go would be beneficial. In addition, walking routes could be explored to allow access to the natural areas around the community so that everyone could experience the recreational and restorative benefits of walking.



COMMUNITY PRIDE

Many of the things that emerged when the Heroes talked about what they would like to see improved in West Sacramento focused on how young people feel about the community and how they think the community feels about youth. Items dealing with community upkeep and appearance, opportunities for participation and the availability of community services were all discussed. When looked at individually these concerns and ideas may appear to have little in common with one another, but they all contribute to a feeling of community pride. Youth believe it is very important that people are proud of where they grow up and live, and think that addressing these issues will help to build a sense of pride for the entire West Sacramento population.



Just like most adults, young people want the community to look nice. A clean and well-maintained appearance provides an indication that the citizens care about where they live. It also provides a signal to youth that adults have invested time and effort to making the community nice. Unkempt alleyways, parks and school grounds are disliked by youth. Graffiti, garbage and poor maintenance are not only unattractive, but they make places seem less safe and infrequently used by others.

Many of the Heroes spoke about opportunities they have had for participating in community improvements and events. They value and enjoy their involvement in hands-on efforts to beautify and improve West Sacramento. More youth and the rest of the population could be encouraged to join in community service activities. Along with these place-based projects, the youth would like to see more opportunities to join with other community members in celebration. They enjoy meeting other people in the community and just having fun. Several youth commented that there are not enough community-based events that are just for the purpose of celebrating a special holiday or event in the community's history. Many expressed disappointment at the discontinuation of the 4th of July celebration and would like to see it return.



Lastly, community pride for the youth is evidenced by the availability of community services. In particular, addressing the needs of the community's homeless population is of great concern to the youth. They see homeless persons and evidence of their activities throughout the community. The youth want to make sure that the unique needs of this group are being met. Another community service that the youth discussed in detail was law enforcement. Although the majority of the Heroes recognize that the police provide an admirable service to the community and many have had positive and supportive interactions with the police, they think it is important to also be aware of the interactions that are negative and unsupportive. Some youth feel that racial profiling is a common practice in the community and that some persons are treated unfairly. This perception diminishes their sense of pride in their community. An examination of possible inequitable treatment is warranted.

EDUCATION

Since school plays a large part in youths' daily lives, the education system was often a topic of conversation. The Heroes had many ideas for improving the current education climate and specifics on the day-to-day occurrences at school. They shared ideas relating to the student relationships and interactions with teachers and staff, their thoughts on the curriculum and student preparation, and their perceptions of peer interactions. In addition, the youth had much to say about school lunches and how they can be improved - particularly at the elementary and junior high schools.



Unfortunately, some of the youth thought that the biggest issue at many schools was an underlying attitude of distrust (and possibly even dislike) of students. They want to be welcomed and supported by the adults that they see on a daily basis. They want the adults working at schools to truly like kids and to want to be there to help them. They want to be met with smiling faces and helpful advice rather than an adult who seems to assume that they must have done something wrong.



Students are very concerned that they receive the best education possible. They feel that due to budget cutbacks and the focus on "No Child Left Behind" curriculum, some classes are no longer offered that they think would be beneficial to them. In particular, elective courses that expose the students to different subjects and potential career choices are not offered as often as the students would like. The students also think that many of their classmates are not receiving adequate advising that would prepare them for continuing their education beyond high school. Some Heroes think that all students in the West Sacramento school system should fulfill the A-G requirements that are needed for college admissions. Even though they may not currently think that they will want to continue on to college, completing these requirements would keep their options open in the future.

The youth also discussed their interactions with other students at school. One of the things that most students like about school is the opportunity to see their friends. Passing in the hallways, brief lunches and seeing one another before and after school are the times when these interchanges currently take place. The young people would like to see the school acknowledge and support their need for talking with their friends by providing more time and places where these exchanges can take place.

RECREATION



Youth in West Sacramento have many things they do for fun. The recreational interests and activities of youth are varied and they look to many different types of facilities and programs to meet their interests. The youth discussions focused on three main types of recreational pursuits - those that are accommodated by programs and classes, commercial-centered activities and outdoor facilities. In all cases, the youth had both good and bad things to say about how their recreational needs were met and they offered ideas for how the recreational interests of youth can be addressed.

All the youth involved in the Youth Voices for Change effort participate in local programs. Some of these programs, including the Sactown Heroes, have purposes beyond recreation, but recreation is one of their benefits. These activities allow the youth opportunities to get together with friends and have fun. Some of the programs are very specific to an individual's particular interest such as dancing. These programs allow youth to develop skills while also having a good time. The youth would like to see more opportunities made available to youth in terms of affordability, frequency and location of these specialized programs. The youth also note that the Collings Teen Center provides a valued venue for young persons for all types of indoor recreation throughout the school year. The facility is centrally located, has interesting games and equipment, supportive adult staff and abundant snacks. Unfortunately, the facility is closed in the summer - a time when many youth are looking for fun things to do. The youth would like to see this program available year-round.

During adolescence, many youth find their recreational outlet in commercial settings. Walking around shops, sharing French fries or watching movies are a few of the recreational activities that youth engage in at commercial businesses. Shop owners can either be welcoming of these activities, or they can frown upon or forbid them. The opportunity to safely test these adult behaviors by youth is needed and should be accepted, or even encouraged, by merchants. Stores that are welcoming to youth should be recognized and celebrated by the community, and youth should be encouraged to respect and appreciate the businesses.



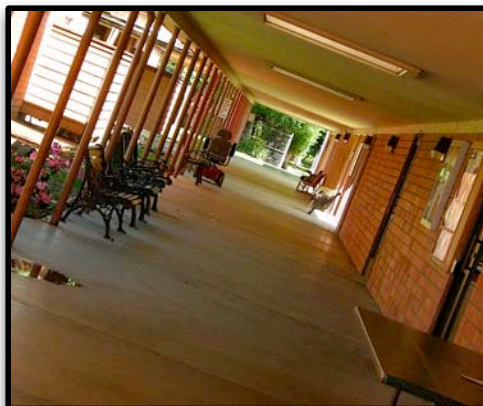
Finally, outdoor facilities provide a place for youth to engage in more active recreational pursuits and to be with nature. West Sacramento has many parks that are dispersed throughout the city, but most of these parks have no facilities that are designed for teenagers. The parks contain play areas for small children and benches for parents, but teen-oriented activities are limited to large play fields, basketball courts and one skatepark. Youth, like the rest of the population, have varied interests - not all teens skateboard - and parks need to accommodate different activities. Future park planning efforts could look at making parks more friendly to teens by including oversized play equipment such as swings or water features for cooling off during the summer months.

MORE ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions is a collaborative partnership between the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, Sierra Health Foundation and The California Endowment that documents the connections between improvements in youth well-being and regional prosperity and equity in the nine-county Sacramento Capital Region. Information generated from this multi-disciplinary effort will support policymaking and advocacy efforts on behalf of youth. Youth Voices for Change is one component of this initiative.

Youth Voices for Change is a community-based mapping project designed to help West Sacramento youth communicate with adult decision makers about the neighborhood conditions that affect their lives and their hopes for the future. Through the project, the Sactown Heroes, a 15-member youth group affiliated with the West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition, collaborated with UC Davis scholars and artists to create a web-based map featuring videos and photographs to share their experiences, opinions and ideas for the future. The Heroes presented their media work and change recommendations to peers, families, educators, policymakers and elected leaders at a public event held at West Sacramento City Hall in June of 2009.

Youth Voices for Change offers young people an opportunity to be heard and to share their thoughts with adults in the community and the region. This project offers a model of youth engagement, influence and action for other regional communities and organizations.



CREDITS

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See [http://
artofregionalchange
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more information on
this project.

