



## South Santa Clara County Active & Safe Parks Initiative

### South County: United for Health Community Transformation Grant (CTG) Spotlight

#### Summary

Santa Clara County residents deserve safe, enjoyable parks where they can be physically active. Parks have the potential to offer individual, social, and environmental opportunities that can benefit an entire community, not just park users. Community leaders in Santa Clara County understand that parks can provide a place for residents to engage in physical activity and make social connections that create community cohesion and social capital.

With Community Transformation Grant funding provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, in collaboration with South County: United for Health partners, implemented the Active and Safe Parks initiative aimed at revitalizing and increasing the use of San Ysidro Park (Gilroy) and Galvan Park (Morgan Hill). Youth Alliance, a local non-profit, united neighborhood residents and community partners to make improvements and bring programming to the parks. These efforts engaged the broader community to support park revitalization and take part in the parks' offerings. The activities increased park usage through new programming and through events reaching 1500 participants; residents, the Public Health Department, and other city and community partners are collaborating to sustain them.

#### Challenge

Physical activity is critical to healthy living. Within Santa Clara County, 55% of adults are overweight or obese according to the 2009 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey. Only 33% of adults in Gilroy and 69% of adults in Morgan Hill met CDC's standards for aerobic physical activity. At the same time, there is a growing body of research confirming the intersection between violence and physical activity. Fear and violence undermine efforts to improve physical activity. Moreover, the frequency and severity of violence and activity-related chronic diseases are greater among young people, low-income communities, and minorities.

San Ysidro and Galvan Parks are in neighborhoods deeply affected by gang activity and violence. Information gathered through park observations and community meetings suggest park safety and the cost of programming pose major barriers to residents' park usage. Residents reported unwelcoming features, such as a 'lack of eyes on the street,' graffiti, litter, and threatening persons or behaviors at both parks.

"We are seeing more events and more people coming out to the park....The community wants elected officials and leaders to commit to expanding current programs and to work with neighborhood volunteers in sustaining efforts to take back the parks."

*-Youth Alliance*

**SOUTH COUNTY:  
UNITED FOR HEALTH**



## South County: United for Health

In September 2012, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department received a two-year Community Transformation Grant (CTG) for Small Communities from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The grant was awarded to help improve and transform the health of south Santa Clara County residents through a collaborative effort known as "South County: United for Health." This grant was funded through the Affordable Care Act.

South County: United for Health's focus is to implement strategies, such as active and safe parks, that help create better health for all South County residents.

To learn more about the Collaborative visit:  
[www.southcountycollaborative.org](http://www.southcountycollaborative.org)

## Solution

A coalition of engaged neighborhood residents and partners can be a visible force that demonstrates the ability and willingness to collectively improve the park. Park enhancements and increased programming can provide opportunities for individual, social, economic, and environmental benefits for both individuals and the community. Collaborating on park improvements and offering physical activity, educational and entertainment programs can foster social interaction, promote a sense of community, and ultimately ensure safety. Between September 2012 and September 2014, Youth Alliance worked in San Ysidro and Galvan Parks along with community coalitions to identify and begin to overcome barriers to park usage. Multiple programs and events were implemented, such as Park Clean-up and Mural Restoration Days.

## Results

The Active and Safe Parks initiative focused on increasing community programs in the parks, while also building resident capacity to advocate for environmental changes. Two coalitions formed near each park – one with adults and one with neighborhood youth. The coalitions helped to organize eight major events, reaching approximately 1500 participants. Coalition members at San Ysidro Park also organized Park Clean-up and Mural Restoration Days in partnership with local organizations. The neighborhood coalitions were also able to increase programming at the parks (such as youth soccer leagues) as a strategy to increase opportunities for physical activity. The high level of participation in community events suggests that residents are enthusiastic about attending new and recurring events at the parks.

One supportive activity was the "Party in the Park" series, funded by a Kaiser Permanente grant. Party in the Park is modeled after Los Angeles County's successful "Parks After Dark" model, which provides additional programming during summer evenings as a means of preventing violence and promoting physical activity. Party in the Park brought together 20 community-based organizations to offer programs, services and activities around physical fitness, public safety, and community resources. Nearly 500 residents participated in the three events.

## Sustainable Success

Involvement from neighborhood residents, city agencies, community-based organizations, and other partners helped build capacity for identifying, planning and implementing activities to make the parks more desirable places. Increased programming and maintenance offered residents safer, more family-oriented opportunities at both parks. Momentum for increasing park utilization may be sustained by South County United for Health, community partners, and city agencies (e.g., Department of Parks & Recreation, Police Department) in the future. Neighborhood coalitions also have established relationships with both cities' Parks & Recreation departments, the South County Collaborative, and other community organizations to generate support for future events.

## Your Involvement is Key

Community involvement is vital to identifying opportunities for residents to be active in their parks through programs, events, and park improvements. For more information, call 408.793.2700 or visit the Santa Clara County Public Health Department's CTG website at [www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org) within the Center for Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention.

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