

The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color is a coalition of change agents committed to improving the life chances of California's boys and young men of color.

The Alliance includes youth, community organizations, foundations, and leaders in government, education, public health, and law enforcement.



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FATHERS & FAMILIES OF SAN JOAQUIN

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Boys & Men of Color

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Healing Generations

by Hannah Flores

The divine imperative to make a contribution to society was invoked during the opening Prayer Breakfast at the 4th Annual Boys and Men of Color Stockton Summit. Reverend Curtis Flemming of Bay Community Fellowship encouraged a room of faith leaders throughout Stockton to identify with the three characters of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He noted that as a condition of being human, all of us have lost our way at one time or another and once we've returned to a path of purpose, our love and gratitude for those who lent their unconditional support to us throughout our journey is insurmountable. Similarly, we've all

been in a position of watching a loved one travel down a dark path and our option to meet that person with derision or love is a choice we have had to make. In considering the struggles of young men of color in San Joaquin County, Reverend Flemming implored the faith community to "widen the circle of concern",



serving not as an exception to society but as an example of love and compassion. After the Prayer Breakfast, renowned family strengthening and therapeutic healing expert Jerry Tello performed a spiritually grounding exercise to open the day's activities. Through personalized storytelling, Tello challenged audience members to again consider whether society sees young boys of color as a problem or a blessing, noting ways in which they are labeled and "treated" by institutions through anger management classes, English as a Second Language, or special needs curricula. Young boys internalize these subtle messages and come to believe that their families and communities are better off without them. Only through the support of their community and the wisdom of the elders can young men transcend self-destructive life-

styles to awaken to a path of depth and purpose. With a sense of import awakened, the audience of faith and city leaders, community members, and public servants listened intently to a panel of systems and philanthropic partners from throughout the state.

The panel provided useful data about Stockton and models of success that the city might look to in considering a path of progress moving forward. Sergio Cuellar, of the [UC Davis Center for Regional Change](#), presented Stockton-specific data from the Regional Opportunity Index (ROI). The ROI is a metric for identifying characteristics of Central Valley communities that suggest social and economic opportunities for policymakers and investors as well as to pinpoint areas of high need. Matt Cervantes of [Sierra Health Foundation](#), discussed his organization's role in contributing to such an approach. By investing in San Joaquin County as one of four counties selected to receive funding by the Positive Youth Justice Initiative, the Sierra Health Foundation hopes to transform

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the traditional corrections model into one designed to promote healthy development of development of young people, particularly crossover youth. Castle Redmond of [The California Endowment](#), spoke next, offering promising educational outcomes when administrators focus on transforming school climate before tackling larger academic goals. Since school suspensions are correlated with lower achievement scores, efforts to promote a sense of safety and inclusion pay off. Jonathan Ronald Tran of the [Southeast Asia Resource Action Center](#) discussed the need for the BMoC movement to include the voice of Southeast Asian men in its narrative. Sharing his own personal story of struggle, Tran noted that many families emigrate from Southeast Asia to the United States as refugees, bringing with them the trauma of war that has detrimental impacts on subsequent generations.

With these ideas in mind, the Assembly [Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color](#) hearing commenced. A panel of local systems, policy leaders, and youth representing the San Joaquin County Alliance took the stage to present specific best practices for improving outcomes of BMoC in Stockton and beyond. Shani Richards of [Health Plan of San Joaquin](#) discussed the importance of partnering with community-based organizations like Fathers & Families of San Joaquin to catalyze a shift in thinking within health systems to address the social determinants of health disparities. And in the field of education, Jennifer Robles of [Stockton Unified School District](#) described an innovative program to improve school climate and student engagement.

To bring the stories to light, three members of the Stockton community shares their experiences on the issues currently affecting BMoC. Devon Camel, graduate of



the Michael G. Santos Foundation Straight-A Guide Program at Fathers & Families talked about the importance of people, specifically formerly incarcerated individual, finding jobs and training programs to be able to sustain and support themselves and their families. Angel Diaz, Youth Organizer at FFSJ, share his educational experience and his recommendations for schools to create an environment that is supportive of all students. He focused on alternatives to discipline and suspensions to ensure that all students receive equitable educational opportunities. Jesse Ezparza, Youth Organizer at FFSJ motivated the audience to join the San Joaquin County BMoC Movement by expressing that his active roles in the Alliance and in the Juvenile Justice subcommittee has been his journey of healing which will transform into community healing.

Real Eyes, Realize, Real Lies

by Jesse Esparza

The day started off quiet and mellow as the youth trickled in one by one - until we eventually reached full capacity. Inside the Raymond Great Hall at University of the Pacific sat 125 youth who face struggles every day in their community, but not this day. Today is their day, where they are provided food, opportunities, education, life and

voice instead of pain, consequences, and incarceration, death and silence barriers that they face daily. "Welcome to our 4th Annual Boys & Men of Color 'Healing Generations' Summit" said Samuel Nunez. "I would like to start the day off by presenting this prize to the first individual that signed in this morning, because it's often times that our youth are recognized when they are late or absent, rather than early and present, so I would like to start the day off by awarding Kyler Brown from Langston Hughes Academy".

Jesse Esparza introduced the first speaker of the day, Michael G Santos, a great example of someone who beaten the odds. Michael started by connecting with the youth by sharing his life story, a man who turned tragedy into triumph. He was released after serving 26 years, 19 years earlier than the 45 he received. With a second chance in society, he developed the Straight-A Guide curriculum to help the re-entry population educate themselves with values we use in everyday. He ended with three powerful words "Visualize, Plan, and Execute," leaving all the youth with hope.

Youth organizers from [Fathers & Families of San Joaquin](#), Samantha Myles and Johnny Orlando followed with a stand

up sit down activity. As they asked the questions, they opened our young men's eyes to realize that they are not alone and that together they can overcome these struggles to succeed in life. Nevertheless ending on a good note, "How many of you have been told 'I Love You', in the last week?" half the room stood up. For those of you that are still sitting just know that you are always loved, "I Love You."

The next speaker was Jeff Duncan- Andrade a fascinating speaker

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who spoke truth to word. Many of our speakers try to frame their presentations in such a manner is approved by society, but the blunt, outspoken, raw truth that Jeff spoke was real. The vibe that he gave showed his passion for helping our young men get off the block and into college, but not just to leave and get away, so that they can bring that knowledge back and transform their community. His philosophy was so authentic, by re-opening the eyes of our people that have been blinded and misled for so many generations. He gave sense to the saying, "real eyes, realize, real lies" for it is our people that are tired of being lied to, tired of being misled, and tired of being taken advantage of, Jeff has motivated our youth to take the boot off their neck and to take a stand! Messages, lessons, and teachings our youth cannot

catch the youths attention. The youth were blown away, but it was their time to shine, SAYS called up three volunteers from the crowd to freestyle anything they felt, ANYTHING. They all rapped with rage, confidence, and pain releasing all these emotions, but most importantly being heard. SAYS ended it with a poem called "A Father for the Fatherless" and sent everyone to lunch thinking deeply about that poem.

Our last speaker, David Mu-

hammad, focused on educating the youth around policies to make systemic change in our community. Stating that incarceration is ineffective, harmful, and excessively expensive, and showing data to back up his statements. Ninety-

Jesse thanks everyone for attending as he starts the closure by raffling gift cards and iPods. Suddenly one person starts what is a new beginning with a CLAP, that starts slowly, until one by one the clap starts to grow, and gets louder, then faster until everyone is clapping at the same pace CLAP,CLAP,CLAP,CLAP,CLAP,CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, and the day ends as one beat, one motion, and one love.

Heart and Spirit Run: A Reflection

by Adam Dyer, PolicyLink

When I was made aware of the Healing Generations Summit that Fathers and Families of SJC would be holding, I knew that I would need to attend the event both for my broader work and for my personal feelings about the specific work going on in Stockton. However, I had no idea how much my involvement would mean on a personal level.

The hearing on Intergenerational Healing Strategies that I attended on Thursday was powerful and moving. As part of the group that contributes to organizing the events, we have discovered that the formula for bringing together systems leaders, legislators and community members, particularly youth who are impacted by their community's commitments, takes the conversation about changing the outcomes for boys and men of color to a whole different level. Legislators who may have been indifferent emerge more committed; systems leaders who are involved in the work, emerge with better



be stripped of, for Jeff had planted the seed to their future.

Following Jeff was [Sacramento Area Youth Speaks](#) (SAYS). They brought awareness to issues we face every day in a spoken word format to

two percent of the homicides in Stockton California in the last 28 years have been our boys and men of color. David explained that the youth voice is key in advocating for bills that affect us and our families.

ideas; community members and youth emerge feeling heard and valued and the combination of these transformations is what will ultimately make a difference.

However, the meaning of this hearing was truly brought home to me when I was able to participate in the Heart and Spirit Run that closed out the Summit on Saturday morning. We met in the early morning at the FFSJ offices and I literally felt "at home" with a wide range of ages and backgrounds (including babies.) It was a small group, but one that has embraced each other through the work, the challenges and in the joys of sharing community. This was really a family affair.

I am a regular runner. My typical run is anywhere from 8 - 10 miles and I move at a fairly quick pace. Running is both a release and a sport for me and I take it seriously. But this run meant something very different and much more. On our route we would take time to acknowledge and pray for different people and families who lost loved ones at various locations around Stockton. The goal was not to maintain an 8 minute mile. Even writing this now, I am moved by just the idea alone. Being in the places where people suffered fatal violence and acknowledging their lives, honoring the space left by their absence is a powerful and inspired gesture. Where other parts of the Summit were more political and informational/educational, this was entirely spiritual.

From the very beginning before we started running, when we came into a circle, just even acknowledging that we were present and that we were united by our mission that day, the air was charged with purpose and emotion.

After dedicating our run to those we love, or have lost or to our hopes for the future, we set out. The 4+ mile course would take us around the heart of downtown to several key locations, each one with a different story. But there was another story that was taking shape as we progressed. When we stopped at one location, bullet holes were still visible. Moving toward another location, there were buildings in disuse. At another location, we learned about a toddler who was killed and at one point we stopped to pray with men who were living in an intentional community to rebuild their lives. There were old houses along the way that spoke of Stockton's former grandeur. The story that emerged was one of great contrasts: murder and affluence; prosperity and tragedy; hope both lost and rediscovered. Our small group too, had contrasts: younger faster runners, older walkers, folks who were more comfortable joining us in the follow up car. But both pictures, that of Stockton itself and that of our rag tag group were complete. They both held the realities that we live every day. This was the power of the Heart and Spirit Run. The work that is happening in Stockton does not seek to erase the past.

First, it acknowledges the past, the suffering, the trauma, the loss and the changes. By doing so, it gives perspective to the importance of moving forward. And like our group of different levels of runners, there is no judgment. Each person, regardless of their ability to run, still has value and a place in the race.

But acknowledging the pain and the past was only one part of the equation. As we neared the end of the run, a beautiful thing began to happen. Each of us, in our own way, began to celebrate. One sprinting to the end, another beaming ear to ear at finishing. Even, in the closing circle, where we were able to bring back around our dedications, took on an air of excitement and deep joy. The goal, that parallels the work of FFSJ, is not about winning the race; that is a lonely endeavor. Rather, it is to finish the race with dignity and having the opportunity to share fully in community. By embracing the many places people come from, the stories they live, the power of the emotions that they carry with them every day, everyone is stronger.

After the run, we shared lunch at Mi Ranchito Café. The conversation was lively and full of life and that in itself is the real lesson. We must acknowledge those who have gone before us; we must acknowledge the pain and honor their passing. But doing so gives us the reason to keep on living fully and the reason to keep on trying to make a difference. This is a beautiful mission. This is family.

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