

# COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PLAN

## GOAL 1.3 LISTENING SESSIONS



### Summary: July 16, 2020 Youth Listening Session

On July 16, 2020, Santa Rosa Police Chief Rainer Navarro, Economic Development Division Director Raissa de la Rosa, Community Engagement Coordinator Danielle Garduño, AmeriCorp VISTA Member Alexandria Anderson, and several staff from the Santa Rosa Violence Prevention Partnership met with youth from Community Action Partnership's Youth Civic Engagement Project (YCEP), Latino Service Provider's Youth Promotores Program, and the Teen Advisory Group for a listening session and dialogue. Below is the list of questions asked and a summary of the discussion following each question. There were seven youth in total who participated in this listening session.

### Santa Rosa Police Department Specific Questions and Discussion

#### 1. What does it mean to feel safe in your community; what does that look like to you?

Most of the youth focused on answering this question with a broad community lens, not just focusing on one sector or service area (e.g. law enforcement, schools, etc.).

Comments, shared and individually, centered around safety meaning being able to walk out your house with comfort, not being put in a position of danger and not fearing being attacked when stepping outside of the house.

Other comments included:

- public safety services could help to make them feel safe, including, feeling comfortable calling emergency resources and getting help, feeling trust with law enforcement, and having deeper connections with law enforcement and City staff;
- feeling safe in their own communities includes the involvement of the broader community, such as removing stigmas of certain areas of town – times have changed, these communities have developed and other residents should know there has been change and there are good people in our neighborhoods;
- being able to rely on the community resources that are available; and
- building strong relationships and knowing your community – “knowing your community makes it a safer place to be.”

#### 2. What has your overall experience been like with the Santa Rosa Police Department?

The majority of the youth participating in this listening session mentioned positive experiencing with officers from the Santa Rosa Police Department (SRPD). These youth mentioned that officers they have had contact with were respectful, able to handle situations well and managed time to focus on issues and solve them. Some mentioned that they met these officers through school, a career fair or a community event. One spoke about his experience with his school resource officer, Officer Crosby: “I was able to grow a connection with him because he came from the same kind of area and background; he offered guidance and helped me turn myself turn around.”

A few others mentioned mixed experiences with officers from the SRPD and other law enforcement agencies. Some youth witnessed their families experience negative interactions with the officers including discrimination, racial profiling, mistaken identity and use of force – one youth watched a family member getting punched in the face by an officer at the age of 4. Another youth stated their experience with officers have been through the resource officer at school: “Having police officers at school makes me feel on edge; there weren’t many positive interactions and it felt like we were always being watched.”

**3. How have other youth around your age described their experiences with SRPD?**

While most of the youth in this listening session mentioned positive interactions with the SRPD, most said many of their peers have had bad experiences with officers. One youth said most of their friends and family “don’t feel comfortable calling the police,” or have any good relationships with them. “It’s been rare to find a friend who has had positive experiences with the police.” The youth mentioned their peers talking about situations with officers that included brutal arrests, racist experiences, mistaken identities, and looking suspicious.

One mentioned that low-income youth seem to have bad experiences with officers. Others pointed to recent protestors being targeted at peaceful protests and some youth now refuse to have any interactions, including these listening sessions, with the SRPD or other City staff.

**4. Chief Navarro followed up with a question regarding protests: any ideas on how to make the demonstrations and protests safer for all? How do we work together to establish a starting point?**

Answers varied, but several stated that community engagement would help to establish a starting point. This includes officers immersing themselves into the community, actively listening and being more cognizant of different backgrounds and practicing cultural competency, offering more communication with those organizing the protests, and having more compassion for the protesters.

One youth stated that it would be helpful to have more officers on staff who grew up in the area – officers would have a better understanding of those living in the community, including who they are and what their struggles are.

Another suggested that the SRPD not use rubber bullets during protests.

**5. What ideas do you have in strengthening relationships with the City and law enforcement?**

**With SRPD:**

All of the youth agreed that the SRPD needs to engage more with the community, and

the police and community both need to work together to move forward. Some suggested workshops or events with officers where the community is invited. Others suggested basketball games with officers and a unity march (e.g. children walking hand in hand with officers).

Recruiting and retaining officers from this community (Santa Rosa and Sonoma County) was restated. Others mentioned having more opportunities to learn with the SRPD does, including more youth citizens academies and opportunities to learn about public safety. Another youth suggested having neighborhood police officers.

One youth was hesitant about having the SRPD engaging with the community at this time. This person stated that many youth do not want to have any engagement or interactions with the SRPD right now, mainly over the use of rubber bullets during protests.

**With Other City Staff and Elected Officials:**

They admitted they aren't as knowledgeable about other parts of the City, so more education regarding City programs, services, resources and staff would be helpful. Knowing what the City does in and for the community would be helpful as well. Better communication and connections with leadership and elected officials would help to strengthen the relationship with the community.

Youth also agreed that cultural competency training and implicit bias training should be available for all City staff.

Finally, having more community conversations such as this one would be helpful in strengthening the relationship between the City and the community.

**6. What are your thoughts on school resource officers (SROs)?**

There were mixed responses from the participating youth on this question. One mentioned that most students do not know what SROs are there for or what their roles are supposed to be. Some parents also seem to be unclear on what SROs are supposed to do at the schools. "I thought if there was a fight, the SROs would help, but it's not like that. Administrators are the ones stopping the fights." Other youth mentioned that they have not had much interaction with the SROS.

Some youth stated they have seen several occasions where SROs had to execute their duties. One suggested that SROs should give a class or workshop on the path to becoming a law enforcement officer. Another asked about having an "officer friendly" program and also the need for bicultural officers serving as SROs.

## General Community Related Questions and Discussion:

1. **What concerns do you have in general since the COVID-19 pandemic and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement?**

Several youth mentioned concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, including the data showing the majority of people with COVID-19 cases in Santa Rosa are Latino. Others are concerned about health of the protesters – there seems to be many people close to each other. Most agreed there is a significant concern with people in the public not wearing masks and hoarding products. “I don’t understand why I have to explain to people why they should care about others.”

There were also concerns mentioned about returning to school, including concerns about kids at school and how masks are going to be enforced.

Others mentioned concerns about the treatment of people of color in Santa Rosa. “Black people should be treated with respect just like everyone else.”

2. **What are some things you’d like to know more about regarding the City (i.e. budget processes, City Council, departments, etc.)?**

The youth listed a variety of things they would like to learn more about regarding the City of Santa Rosa, including:

- City council spending plan and how they’re giving back to the community
- Roles of elected officials
- Opportunities to learn about other careers at the City (not just law enforcement)
- Internships with the City
- Recruitment and retainment of officers