

**HEALTH HAPPENS IN YOUTH MEDIA**  
**Restorative Justice, Food Bill of Rights, Stress Management, Housing, Parks,**  
**and Youth Reactions to Newtown**  
Issue 10: December 21, 2012

[Youth Media for Building Health Communities](#): Each week in the 14 BHC places, young people knit together experiences at school, at work, at home and in their neighborhoods to tell stories about how health happens.



John Alex Pena had heard about the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) before he was caught spray painting school property. But until he took accountability for his actions, he hadn't understood the value of restorative justice. *"Basically what you do is you apologize to the victim. They have you talk with them and sign a contract and help them out."* Co-published by the [Fresno Bee](#) and [The Know Youth Media](#).

Peacemaker is a youth-led restorative justice program out of East Oakland's Castlemont High School. *"As opposed to punishing them, we work to have our young people reflect on the impact of their actions."* [Youth Uprising](#).

At Hiram Johnson High School, a stigma of violence and bad behavior has lifted through programs promoting safe environments and administrative involvement. The student support, called Peer Mediators, has been instrumental in this shift. *"If programs like this were implemented in other schools it could reduce the behavior issues, allowing school staffers to focus more on education."* [Access Sacramento](#).

Students in Long Beach, which boasts one of the worst graduation rates in the state, want to reform the Long Beach Unified School District's disciplinary code. "Willful defiance," for example, is often a trigger term for removing African American and Latino males from stressful classroom situations. *"Acts that can be considered defiant range from laughing, to eye-rolling, to improper attire. The objection most policy opponents have with the violation is that it's ambiguous."* [Voicewaves](#).

Until the new Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) program was implemented earlier this year, students in the Los Angeles Unified School District had to qualify for government-subsidized school meals in order to eat for free at school. Many kids from low-income families went without breakfast. Now LAUSD schools have implemented free child nutrition programs that allow every student to eat school food at no cost. *"More students are arriving earlier to class, and there's been less tardiness, and they are definitely more alert and focused."* [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

John Gonzalez didn't want to be another statistic. No one in his family had graduated from college, and after a family tragedy, John graduated high school and attended Fresno Community College, *"to be somebody important in this world."* He became a Special Ed teacher and says he wouldn't trade his job for the world. [The Know](#).

California's AB 9, A Safe Place to Learn Act, required schools to update bullying policies to specifically include issues of "sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression." Long Beach-area school districts have been criticized for "ignoring" the policy deadline. School authorities counter that budget cuts present obstacles to addressing bullying. *"Whether or not we think a student is being bullied doesn't matter. If that kid feels like they're bullied, they're not going to learn."* [Voicewaves](#).

Once stress starts, it becomes hard to break free. It can overwhelm anyone, particularly teenagers, few of whom know how to manage their time properly. *“Once you start getting stressed, it becomes very hard to break free of it.”* [Access Sacramento](#).

Nineteen-year-old Maya Salsedo’s Youth Food Bill of Rights, a 17-point declaration for sustainable eating, got the attention of Brower Youth Award. Salsedo’s parents worked in Hawaiian sugar cane fields when she was young, and the bill focuses on knowing where our food comes from. *“We have the right to save our seed.”* [Youth Radio](#).

Apprenticeships offer a way for people with lower levels of formal education to develop marketable skills. Over 50 apprenticeship programs are available in Long Beach alone. Many programs only require a high school education to enroll, and individuals with felony convictions can find steady work in construction or as electricians and pipe-fitters. *“If I wasn’t doing this, I’d probably have my old job, but I’d still be acting wild and running the streets trying to make ends meet.”* [Voicewaves](#).

Eighty-one percent of California voters supported Proposition 35 (also called the CASE Act), expanding legal protections for victims of sex trafficking, and specifying harsher punishments for pimps. But some have expressed concern about the language of the act, and worry that the law could have serious unintended side effects. *“Hopefully the Case Act will be used as it was intended, to target child sex trafficking rather than persecute willing sex workers.”* [Richmond Pulse](#).

Along the streets of gun violence-plagued East Oakland, ambassadors from the Urban Peace Movement have planted billboards depicting young adults holding portraits of lost loved ones. *“Young people in Oakland are too often left to themselves to deal with their trauma.”* [Youth Radio](#).

In Boyle Heights, Zumba has become a workout craze, with classes and studios popping up everywhere. One big reason for Zumba’s popularity here is the Latin music incorporated into the exercise class. *“I like the music, and apart from that, I also see the results.”* [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

A new report says that teens in solitary confinement suffer mentally — from hallucinations to suicide. *“With so many juveniles tried and convicted as adults, officials say the practice allows juveniles to be kept separate from older prisoners.”* [Youth Radio](#).

Long Beach has been enforcing injunctions, court-issued restraining orders against gangs or groups of named persons, since 1992, but recent years have seen an aggressive uptick in enforcement. Many agree the injunctions, which bypass due process, disproportionately affect youth. *“It does the opposite of what it’s suppose to do, which is to push people out of gangs, and it pulls them even more into illegal activities.”* [Voicewaves](#).

Gun violence among teenagers in Oakland has raised the homicide count to 115 this year. Youth Radio talks with Oakland youth and researchers at the University of Chicago Crime Lab about the repercussions and causes of violence with guns. *“There is a causal link between keeping the kid in high school, helping them to graduate, and reducing the likelihood they become a victim or perpetrator of violence.”* [Youth Radio](#).

Proposed use of new city-owned property in Long Beach requires some of the site to be designated for services for homeless and mentally ill citizens. Predictably, some residents are voicing objections. *“It’s just gonna make our neighborhood look bad.”* Proponents argue that a mental health facility improves an area. [Voicewaves](#).

With 100 stores that sell alcohol, Boyle Heights has 77 percent more such stores than West Covina, and 45 percent more than Compton and Santa Monica. *“Mom-and-pop shops typically don’t have a lot of capital, making liquor a desirable item to sell, since it brings in higher profits.”* The Boyle Heights Stakeholders Association launched a community-driven campaign to voice their concern to local officials about the excessive availability of alcohol. [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

The Alvaros are among 32 families leaving the Duroville trailer park, a community of farmworkers near Mecca, for Mountain View Estates, a county-private partnership for affordable housing. *“I am grateful that they have a decent, safe, and sanitary place to call home.”* Developers anticipate dozens more moving in before the year is out. [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

The proposed expansion of the Cesar Chavez Library promises to bring more opportunities for learning and community for children in East Salinas, California. *“You can dream here!”* [Youth Uprising](#).

A Richmond native shares his opinion on the changing street game. *“Nowadays, your average dope dealer or gangster is often also pimping. I’ve even seen junior high and high school students pimping the girls in their classroom. Preying on abused girls who may lack self-respect or a sense of identity, or who come from dysfunctional households, is not fly. Also, the notion that only “bad” girls are out there on the streets is a myth.”* [Richmond Pulse](#).

In many low-income neighborhoods, supermarkets are rare and spotty transportation makes getting to them a challenge. Some experts believe that improving access to healthy food will enable people to eat more healthily and avoid obesity. The new Northgate González grocery store in Boyle Heights provides free shuttles. Others say that improving access is only part of the solution — and it takes a lot more to change the way people eat. *“While some researchers have looked at the number of markets in the area, others have examined the number of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores.”* [Boyle Heights Beat](#).

Almost a year after the heated debate over the Downtown Plan began, residents are still fighting to keep the integrity of their neighborhoods — and to improve access to quality affordable housing. *“We hear from a lot of community members that it continues to get harder and harder to find an affordable place to live.”* They are demanding that the Downtown Plan incorporate “community benefits,” requiring mixed income housing, a commercial linkage fee, local hiring, and first refusal for low-income residents. [Voicewaves](#).

Boyle Heights is home to more than 80,000 residents and only about ten public parks. Even when parks are nearby, some say they can’t find a place to play a casual game of soccer. *“They have the whole field gated off because it’s an artificial turf, so you have to be on a team or have a permit to go out and use the field, which I thought was kind of messed up.”* [Boyle Heights Beat](#).



#### YOUTH REACT TO THE NEWTOWN TRAGEDY:

Johnny Flores Jr., a high school student, processes the recent shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. *“Now schools, including my own, are taking additional measures to ensure the safety of students: installing security cameras, closing unnecessary gates, creating check-in stations, and more. However, even with these extra precautions, the sad truth is that we must remind ourselves that something can always happen. This is the world we now live in.”* [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Shock and grief over the Newtown shootings is felt in Richmond, as well, but some question why the violence against children in their city — populated with minorities and low income families — does not provoke similar outrage. *“The killing of children shouldn’t happen on either side of the tracks, so it’s sad that when it does happen in areas like Oakland or Richmond, it’s like people expected it to happen.”* [Richmond Pulse](#).

An Oakland teen describes the gun culture in her city, where gun violence is stubbornly high. *“No one brings guns inside parties, but within steps of the front door, I guarantee that there are guns stashed in bushes, locked inside cars, ready to go, just in-case.”* [Youth Radio](#).

**This wouldn’t be a newsletter of youth voices if everything they said fit neatly into our agenda. On that note...** To accompany the opening of the second largest Chicano/Mexican-American historical mural in California, the community celebrated local cultural treasures in a festival of music, art, dance, food, and synergy. A slideshow of the photos can be viewed on [Coachella Unincorporated](#).

Visit <http://ymbhc.wordpress.com/> for more youth perspectives on community health.