

*Written by Jim Rodgers from the West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition*

The [West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition](#) (WSYRC) was formed in 2006 to equip middle and high school age youth with the skills to emerge as community change leaders in partnership with adults. WSYRC brings together their family, culture and community settings, the systems and services of their daily lives and the policy, advocacy and practice arenas affecting youth. Their goal is to create the climate in West Sacramento for a youth-friendly community through genuine youth/adult partnership for leadership toward lasting community change.

Using the youth development model, WSYRC's process includes creating a neutral environment for youth and adults to feel safe and experience equal decision making power. Facilitating the growth of positive relationships is another key element of the youth development approach. Through peer learning, youth have the opportunity to experience real world processes from the adults they work with. Furthermore, youth are then able to apply their new skills to their own development, and furthermore, the development of the community in which they live.

[Sactown Heroes](#), as the Coalition's youth leaders named themselves, was formed during the creation of the WSYRC. In 2007, WSYRC youth and adult partners discerned that safety was the core issue for young people in West Sacramento. The Sactown Heroes soon emerged as the youth leadership group driving the Coalition and a base community for taking on issues. Creating a strong youth voice in community became the guide for a Master Action Plan of five strategies with specific activities that continues to guide WSYRC today. By 2008, the Sactown Heroes were leading community improvement projects for safer, more inviting public spaces. They took a previously inaccessible area at the senior living center and created an outdoor seating and gardening area. With a local artist and businessman, they created three mosaic benches to compliment new landscaping and a sunflower bed at Riverbank School.

In 2009, the Sactown Heroes began what has become an ongoing collaboration with UC Davis' Healthy Youth/Healthy Region project to produce *Youth Voices for Change* (YVC), a multi-media community report on youth safety. Its debut at a youth-run Multimedia Showcase at City Hall attracted regional media and impressed the Mayor and other local elected and civic leaders. YVC's West Sacramento Google Map on safety remains an active tool on local websites. A comic book version of YVC has been distributed to community leaders for education on community change for greater safety.

In 2009-2010, these successes cascaded into invitations. The City of West Sacramento asked the Sactown Heroes to participate in a parks masterplanning process as co-facilitators with landscape architects at community meetings. The City Council appointed three Sactown Heroes to its Youth Commission, one elected chair, to provide youth perspective to the City Council. The new Bryte & Broderick Community Action Network involved youth in their formation meetings and planning retreats. Out of that process, the Sactown Heroes were invited to partner as weekly vendors in West Sacramento's first Urban Farm Stand from June through October each year.

For 2010-2012, WSYRC was able to combine these opportunities with the City and BBCAN to win a two year grant from the Community Clinics Initiative (CCI). The Sactown Heroes major project through 2012 will be *Refresh: Think Before You Eat*, an interactive community report

combining their parks planning and access to fresh food work to change community perspectives on active healthy living. The report will provide an on-the-ground youth critique to educate families on healthy choices and create easy suggestions to help families take action for a healthier lifestyle.

Equipping youth with a stronger voice in the community creates the legacy of developing future civic leaders in West Sacramento. Building capacity for youth leadership and improving adult-youth relations is giving young people a base in West Sacramento to call their own. By developing leadership, youth acquire formative experiences, skills and confidence to pursue higher education, form businesses, become valued employees, stand for election and become a network of civic leaders who will stay here to live, work and raise families—the future everyone wants for their communities!

WSYRC is recruiting board members. If you are interested in learning more about or engaging with the WSYRC, please contact [Jim Rodgers](#) or click [here](#).