



Contra Costa County: RYSEing to the Occasion

OCTOBER 2, 2014 | [GREGG FISHMAN](#)

See the video about the RYSE Center by [clicking on this link](#), and all of the videos from “An Ounce of Prevention” are [available here](#).

California Counties are focused on preventing problems and intervening in issues before they become more serious. All during the month of October, CSAC is profiling California County programs that typify the concept of Prevention and Early Intervention. We are writing blogs, and presenting videos that hopefully give you an up-close look at how some Counties are putting the concept of Prevention and Early Intervention to work. We were inspired in this effort by Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, who chose Prevention and Early Intervention as the theme for his term as CSAC President. We were equally inspired by the programs we found that really do help people, save money and produce better outcomes. We hope you are as well.

A lot of words have been used to describe Richmond, in Contra Costa County, and many of them are not positive. “Hardscrabble” comes to mind. But after a recent visit to the RYSE Center in Richmond, new words and images also attend there: hopeful, progressive, talented, poetic, caring, and joyful. The RYSE Center for teens and young adults provides a safe place to hang out, help with schoolwork, counseling services, or a decent meal. But there is more there than programs. RYSE leads with the heart!

Donte Clark, one of Richmond’s Poets Laureate, told me, RYSE is like “an oasis in the desert.” He dreams of the day when the safety, comfort and opportunities at the RYSE center become the norm in Richmond.

Contra Costa County continues to provide funding for RYSE—but the county has been purposefully and diligently respectful of the RYSE mission and methods. The county stability allows RYSE to attract grants and revenue from other sources, but the people who run the RYSE Center (it’s pronounced “rise” as in “rise up.”) celebrate that it is largely the young people themselves who determine what happens there.

With their input, RYSE offers performing arts and spoken word programs, video and music production classes, trauma counseling to help ease the grief of violence, snacks or more substantial meals if needed, and a basketball court and garden out back. And through these programs, they offer hope. And to a great degree it is the collaborative, and yet “hands off” approach from Contra Costa County that makes the Center work.

CSAC is profiling the RYSE Center as part of our Prevention and Early Intervention video series highlighting county programs that work proactively to solve problems. Contra County Supervisor John Gioia chose prevention and early intervention as his theme for his year as CSAC President. He has been one of the driving forces behind the RYSE Center. Through him, the county provided an unused building for the youth center, and he personally applied a lot of paint and elbow grease to help transform it into the joyful, poetic place it is today.

The result is a multi-ethnic community, a collaborative spirit, a safe place to hang out, and a place to heal. Richmond is still an imperfect place in many ways. But the RYSE center provides a glimpse of what can be. This is prevention and early intervention in its most human form. The RYSE Center is saving lives, and transforming them.

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