

# Building a *Healthy and Safe Communities* Workforce

with  
California WALKS' Youth Leaders

A California WALKS Network Case Study

## Introduction

Pedestrian safety in the context of healthy and safe communities is a growing field. California WALKS is committed to building the walking transportation profession by educating children and youth to be savvy about what it means to have a walkable, vibrant and healthy community and engaging them in advocating for community change to realize such sustainable communities.

## Background and Need

California WALKS has been immersed in community engagement, education and empowerment for healthy, safe walkable environments as part of the climate action greenhouse gas reduction national effort. We coordinate statewide community-driven local advocacy for sustainable community change. Our at-risk youth focus led to the development of our youth-led Video Voice Mapping (VVM) project.



*CW WALKS Youth preparing to teach adults.  
Photo credit: Wendy Alfson*

## Process and Actions

Working statewide on walking, California WALKS became connected to the youth of the Greenfield walking group and started to learn VVM from these youth. Youth had perfected VVM as an advocacy tool for telling the stories of their community life experience. From learning VVM and having environmental and policy change successes, Kern County youth, wanted to become trainers and teach others on the methodology. They formed a team, and under sponsorship of CW have taken VVM statewide. They have served as a catalyst for healthier communities where all people can share solutions to challenges they face every day. For nearly three years, these Youth VVM Trainers have been training youth and adults across the state and nation, most recently via Kaiser regional webinars and American Public Health Association (APHA) Community-Based Public Health National Youth Council leadership. The California Endowment is funding youth-driven community advocacy utilizing community-produced videos to impact climate action for healthy, safe communities outcomes.

VVM empowers community members to document self-identified community needs and success through a personal video interview process by asking and answering the following questions:

1. Where are we?
2. What is really going on here? Why is it important?
3. How does it affect us?
4. What can we do about it? If we need help, who and what help do we need?

VVM uses social media to advance opportunities for change and advocacy for individuals and communities. Digital

storytelling has become an essential method of enhancing education and communication by making abstract or conceptual content more understandable. It engages participants and audiences through images and audio, providing a compelling way of sharing that, in turn, fosters more collaboration and accomplishment. Through this experience they identify what needed to be changed and what they could do as the next steps in achieving that change.

## Results and Outcomes

A Few of California WALKS' Kern County Youth VVM Leadership and Professional Development Successes:

- VVM has been encouraged by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The California Endowment.
- Kaiser Permanente invited California WALKS Video Voice Mapping Youth Trainers to conduct webinar VVM training for their Healthy Communities grantees in summer 2011. The webinars, presented by CWVVM Youth Trainers from Bakersfield, were in both [Spanish](#) and [English](#) to 17 different non-profits throughout the San Fernando Valley and Ventura County.
- VVM is being recognized as a national and statewide model at [APHA](#), the [Transportation Research Board](#) and [Safe Routes to School](#) conferences.

California WALKS VVM Youth Leaders are making a difference and moving forward to advance public health priorities and their own career development.

- Diana (16) was elected, Secretary for the APHA Youth Council of the Community-Based Public Health Caucus, 2011.
- Oscar at 17 was honored as a CA "Youth Champion for Change", for his work focused on changing the environment for youth obesity and safe routes to school. (Network for a Healthy California). A year later he is now focused on increasing opportunity for college education and public health workforce development.
- Julia (at 14) was asked by Policy Link, the California Convergence, and Transportation for America to represent the national "YOUTH VOICE" speaking and advocating at the U.S. Capital Senate, meeting with Senator Barbara Boxer. In 2011, she was asked to speak at the National Press Club on a transportation panel regarding the future of the United States Transportation System.



*CW Walks Youth presenting in San Diego.*

*Photo credit: Rhianna Babka*

## Conclusion and Looking Forward

Now, CW seeks support and community partners whose mission is to transform the lives of young people by mobilizing the power and passion of communities working together. California Youth Leaders, through our partnerships, can create dramatic change in improved health outcomes locally, regionally and nationally. Please join us in supporting extraordinary youth across California seeking access to education and employment opportunities to continue their effective healthy community advocacy across their lifetimes.



This case study is part of California WALKS's effort to share information and best practices from around California. We are highlighting the work of our network members and groups we have worked with to show the depth and breadth of pedestrian safety efforts in the state. Please contact Rhianna Babka ([Rhianna@californiawalks.org](mailto:Rhianna@californiawalks.org)) for more information or to share a case study from your community.