

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

### **United Way and University of California, Santa Cruz Awarded National Institutional Challenge Grant to Empower Youth Leadership**



*Youth public health advocates through United Way of Santa Cruz County's Jovenes SANOS program meet with U.S. Representative Jimmy Panetta (CA). A new research partnership between UC Santa Cruz and United Way will offer local youth and UC Santa Cruz undergraduates the opportunity to study issues affecting health and wellbeing throughout Santa Cruz County. Photo Credit: Shmuel Thaler*

**Santa Cruz, CA (April 21, 2021)** – A new three-year, \$650,000 grant will link University of California, Santa Cruz and United Way of Santa Cruz County's Youth Action Network – Jovenes SANOS to support youth empowerment and leadership throughout Santa Cruz County. Faculty and undergraduate students will partner with local high school and middle school students in Watsonville and Santa Cruz/Live Oak to design and implement community-engaged research.

This work will provide new insight on youth education, health, and wellbeing initiatives and community services for immigrant and mixed-status families, unhoused families, and migrant working families. Jovenes SANOS youth and UC Santa Cruz undergraduates who gain research experience through the program will have a new leadership platform to influence local policy. Also, the program is designed to support college readiness and success, particularly for Latinx students and other students of color who are or will be the first in their families to attend college.

The funding for this project comes from the highly competitive, nationwide [Institutional Challenge Grant](#), supported by the William T. Grant Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. These grants help universities and community organizations work together to reduce inequities in youth outcomes. UC Santa Cruz, Johns Hopkins University, and Northeastern University were this year’s winners, while Cornell University received a continuation of funding.



United Way of Santa Cruz  
County Chief Executive Officer  
Keisha Browder

“Make no mistake, there were much larger institutions and larger agencies as finalists for this award”, said Keisha Browder, chief executive officer of United Way of Santa Cruz County. “For UC Santa Cruz and United Way to win this award affirms our ability to deepen and scale our work to improve youth outcomes.”

**Youth Leadership Through Research**

Browder will work alongside Associate Professor of Sociology Rebecca London and Professor of Psychology Regina Langhout to co-manage the new grant project, which kicks off in September. This first step will be a nine-month planning period including a workshop with undergraduates and youth leaders to develop a youth-driven research agenda. After the initial planning, four cohorts of about 30 middle and high school students from United Way’s Youth Action Network and Jovenes SANOS will partner with similar cohorts of UC Santa Cruz undergraduate students to conduct research in the community. They’ll be



United Way of Santa Cruz County  
Community Impact Coordinator  
Amanda Gamban

guided by United Way Community Impact Coordinators Amanda Gamban, Youth Action Network, and Gabriela Ramirez Sanchez, Jovenes SANOS (UCSC 2017 graduate). UC Santa Cruz faculty fellows will also guide this process: Professor Langhout, Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies Jessica Taft, Associate Professor of Sociology Steve McKay, and Assistant Professor of Psychology Saskias Casanova.



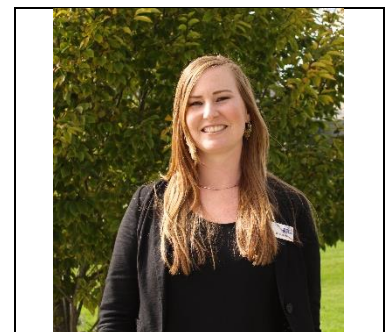
United Way of Santa Cruz County  
Community Impact Coordinator  
Gabriela Ramirez Sanchez

“These fellows are phenomenal ambassadors for our work in the community,” said Rebecca London, the grant’s principal investigator.

“They each have a lot they can share about ethical and actionable community-engaged research. I’m looking forward to working alongside them in the formation of this partnership, and I think the young people in our community will be really excited about it too.”

The project is also designed to position undergraduates as mentors for local youth. First generation college students of color face inequities in access to research opportunities, but new community-engaged research projects can help to close the gap while fostering meaningful connections with youth from similar backgrounds.

“This is an opportunity to truly connect our youth to college students and the college experience,” Keisha Browder explained. “The sense of belonging builds their confidence for college and research/ You see high school students walk with pride that they are doing this type of work. It gives us a change to ignite that passion in a student and get them imagining who they could be once they step onto a college campus”.



United Way of Santa Cruz County  
Director of Community Impact  
Sarah Emmert

**Building Capacity for the Future**

Sarah Emmert, Director of Community Impact at United Way, will advise on the program’s research projects as a Community Fellow. Through this process, Emmert, a 2011 UCSC graduate, will learn new research methods and strategies for applying and disseminating findings throughout the community. The goal is to strengthen United Way’s role as a local leader in using research to inform practice for public service programs.

This grant will also give UC Santa Cruz an opportunity to build new internal structures and policies that will help advance the university's impact in the community. With the support of the Office of Research, the project will develop ethics guidelines for community-based research and incorporate input from partners like United Way. The grant project will also recommend university-wide standards for how the value of community-engaged work is weighed in processes like tenure decisions and departmental reviews.

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**United Way of Santa Cruz County**

United Way of Santa Cruz County works to create a healthy, thriving, and safe community for all. UWSCC is leading a movement to focus donated resources on programs that have significant impact within our county; to move the needle by addressing our greatest needs. For more information, please visit [www.unitedwaysc.org](http://www.unitedwaysc.org)