



# SOCIAL ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH (SAY)

*Ending youth homelessness*



## What we do:

SAY runs two key programs in Sonoma Valley. The Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps is an eight-week summer jobs program that develops the potential of Sonoma youth as citizens, employees, and leaders in our community. SAY also provides school-based mental health services in Sonoma Valley High School and Altimira and Adele Harrison Middle Schools. This past year, SAY provided 247 counseling sessions for 71 vulnerable Sonoma Valley youth, and 83 percent of those participating in counseling exhibited positive behavior change. SAY also participated in a collaborative explorations study to identify ways to stimulate gang prevention, intervention, and youth engagement in the Valley.

## Our start:

Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) was founded in 1971 by four community leaders in response to concerns over the lack of child abuse prevention and intervention services in Sonoma County.

These leaders took action to organize SAY because they believed the community had a responsibility to help kids who lacked essential support systems: foster children who became homeless when they turn 18, or teenagers who ran away from abusive homes with nowhere to go and no one to turn to for help.

In response to their needs, Social Advocates for Youth was formed and began offering individual and family counseling to children, teens, youth, and families throughout Sonoma County.

## A single story:

Like more than 70 percent of the 1,200 youth that have participated in the summer Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps (SCYEC), Maricela had risk factors that could easily have threatened her high school graduation and created barriers to future employment. The SCYEC program offered her just what was needed for her success.

The SCYEC “teaches us how to work together and to be punctual. Our supervisor helps us with the work, future employment, and even our personal problems,” said Maricela.

After being employed by the SCYEC in 2012, Maricela enrolled in a year-round SAY program in Sonoma Valley. In her senior year, she was struggling academically in Language Arts and did not have a computer at home. A lack of Internet access was a huge barrier to completing her senior project. Every other day after school, Maricela would go to the SAY-Sonoma office and use the computer to work on her senior project. Her case manager served as a mentor and reviewed her work on a weekly basis.

Maricela worked hard and graduated on time. She is interested in eventually becoming a teacher and hopes to become a crew supervisor with the SCYEC.

## Our future:

We will be opening the SAY “Dream Center” in the old Warrack Hospital site in Santa Rosa in 2015. When fully operational, the Dream Center will include 63 units of housing for homeless and former foster 18-24 year olds, along with counseling and job-training services.



**Impact100 Sonoma awarded an Impact Finalist Grant of \$2,500 to Social Advocates for Youth (2010).**