



WAYMAKERS AWARDED \$1 MILLION GRANT TO EMPOWER YOUTH AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Grant Funding Allows Orange County Nonprofit to Partner with Anaheim Union High School District on Youth Leadership Development Program

Santa Ana, Calif., March 15, 2022 – Waymakers, a nonprofit organization that builds safer communities by helping individuals make their way through conflict and crisis to a place of strength and stability, has been awarded a three-year, \$1 million grant from Elevate Youth California for the purpose of working with youth ages 12 to 26, providing youth social justice, peer support and mentorship to low-income communities. The grant comes from Elevate Youth California, a project of The Center at Sierra Health Foundation under contract with the State of California's Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), is funded through the DHCS Proposition 64 California Cannabis Tax Fund, Allocation 3, Youth Education Prevention Early Intervention and Treatment Account.

Waymakers will partner with the Anaheim Union High School District to create a student-led youth leadership development program with the goal of reducing substance abuse. The program will focus on social and emotional learning while educating students on drugs most commonly abused and addiction. In addition, the program will help students with communications, organization, planning, and public speaking skills, all through a cultural lens. This program will also provide the opportunity for members of the community who have been successful in overcoming drug abuse to be involved in the youth project in addition to providing youth with experiences that will guide them to create change in the world around them.

"This funding will be instrumental in the regrowth and success of the communities we serve that are affected by drug and alcohol abuse," said Ronnetta Johnson, CEO of Waymakers. "We will be able to give the youth of these communities a newfound sense of purpose and drive as they are empowered to make a difference in the lives of those around them through the newly created youth leadership development program."

Elevate Youth California connects youth and their families to programs that include wraparound care in communities disproportionately harmed by past and current drug policies and criminalized for substance use disorder. Waymakers was one of 61 community-based and Tribal organizations throughout California awarded a total of \$52 million for youth substance use prevention activities in this round of funding. A full list of organizations that received awards is available on the [Elevate Youth California website](#).

"Elevate Youth California prioritizes youth leadership and invests in healing and community growth," said Chet P. Hewitt, president, and CEO of Sierra Health Foundation and The Center. "Our new partners will work directly with youth to improve the environment of communities impacted by the War on Drugs, which has led to inequity in our health systems and the criminalization of youth in low-income communities and communities of color. California's youth are talented, capable, and ready for this investment."

"It is inspiring to see the level of positive change that the 61 culturally responsive Elevate Youth California community partners presented in their applications," said Marlies Perez, chief of DHCS' Community Services Division. "As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, and our young people re-engage in school and community, the third cohort of nonprofit community and Tribal partners have found innovative ways to meet the multiple complex needs of our young people."

For more information on Waymakers, visit waymakersoc.org.

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About Waymakers

Every day throughout Orange County, people find hope after trauma. They don't simply survive; they find ways to heal – all with the help of Waymakers, formerly called Community Service Programs. Our eight model programs guide over 125,000 abused children, crime victims, struggling families, acting-out adolescents, and people needing mediation services annually. Waymakers has been sheltering children, supporting victims, counseling families, resolving conflicts, and educating communities in Orange County since 1972. Learn more at WaymakersOC.org.

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