

November 29, 2010

Dear Santa Maria Valley Future Search Conference Participants,

Well, it's hard to believe that over nine months have passed since we gathered for the S.M. Valley Future Search Conference last February. And, like the 9 mo. gestation period of a human fetus the slow but steady growth of functions & projects from our 'Conference' continues to evolve.

Out of the seven strategy groups/ 'Clouds' that were originally shaped from the 'Conference' six have continued to meet on a monthly basis. Additionally, a 'Leadership Cloud' which serves to coordinate and share information amongst the 6 clouds (meets on the 1st Friday of each month)... As well as an 'Administrative Cloud' which serves to administer financial/ fiscal and the pragmatic logistics of the clouds (meets on the 1st Tuesday of ea. month) have been developed. And, within the past month a 'Fiscal Agreement' between the Administrative Cloud and the NSBC United Way was signed to provide lead agency covering for such issues as banking, communications, personnel development, etc... For more information concerning this brief up-date or specific agendas/ projects the 'Clouds' are currently pursuing please contact Sandy Soria at NSBC United Way at 805.922.0329 x105 or Patricia Solorio at Future Leaders of America at 805.925.1010.

Finally, enclosed/ attached you will find the final 'Santa Maria Valley Future Search Conference Report' as recorded by Katie Liljedahl. Hopefully it will serve as a positive reminder of your valued participation in the 3 day 'Conference' and prove to be an on-going documented reflection of what a "small group of thoughtful, committed citizens" can do to initiate change within our community. Also, should it stimulate a renewed interested in/with rejoining the process feel free to contact Sandy or Patricia. Your support – has, is, and will always be treasured!

Thanks Again for Your Commitment!!!

S.M.V. Future Search - 'Administrative Cloud'

Santa Maria Valley Future Search Conference Report

February 9 - 11, 2010 ~ Maldonado Youth Center

As Recorded By: Katie Liljedahl

The spirit of Margaret Meade's quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that has" came to life during Santa Maria Valley's Future Search Conference' - which took place at the Abel Maldonado Youth Center in downtown Santa Maria, California February 9 to 11, 2010.

The Future Search model is about a community gathering together to: "Explore a promising way for enabling a diverse group of people with a stake in the community to plan their own future. The Future Search brings a whole system in to the room to explore participants past, present, and desired future as a backdrop to action planning. If we want dramatic new action plans, we need to use structures, and processes equal to our aspirations."

Inspired by a group of a concerned citizens and led by Daniel Holden of Daniel Holden & Associates, an organization dedicated to transforming adversity into power by facilitating conferences and trainings which inspire leadership and transformation, Future Search participants dedicated themselves to three days of confronting what one County Supervisor called: "The number one issue of our community" - youth violence.

Planning

A Collaborative Leadership Team which had been meeting for over 6 months worked to identify 80 to 100 individuals from the Santa Maria Valley to represent each of the following stakeholder groups:

- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Faith Based
- Business
- Families
- Government
- Health Care
- Law Enforcement
- Non Profits
- Youth

Activities at the Future Search Conference would include members of these groups convening within their stakeholder groups as well as activities leading to interactions among different stakeholder groups. The stakeholder groups were designed to ensure that all members of the community (high school students, public attorneys, small business owners, executive directors and staff of non profits, police chiefs and front-line officers, moms, dads, radio talk show hosts, educators, parole and probation officers, and current and former gang members) would be represented to take ownership and demonstrate leadership in ways which would ultimately prove to be organic and authentic.

Day One - Our Shared History

The first day of the conference was dedicated to looking at the past and honoring the ways in which participants have individually as well as collectively been shaped and impacted by violence. The first activity, and one of the most powerful, consisted of participants brainstorming ways in which violence has affected them on different levels. Participants were asked to share the ways violence has affected them personally, ways in which violence has affected their community, and the role violence has played in the global landscape and then write their responses on wall sized poster paper covering the back wall of the Maldonado Youth Center. When responding to these questions, the participants were prompted to look

back at the last three decades and respond to each decade separately. The end product was a chronological tale of the ways in which violence has impacted the Santa Maria Valley.

As these statements were read over & over by participants perusing the back wall, each person’s story came to life and each participant was given voice through the power of the written word.

| How has violence affected me personally, my community, the global? | | |
|---|--|--|
| Personally | Community | Globally |
| <i>“ my family and myself part of the gang lifestyle”</i> <i>“Violence at home and my Dad a heroin addict”</i> <i>“A lot of drug use all around me”</i> <i>“Pat Muldoon suicide”</i> <i>“Friend dies in Iraqi”</i> <i>“My brother killed himself”</i> <i>“Friend committed suicide due to being bullied”.</i> | <i>“The Peppertree Shootings”</i> <i>“White Flight”</i> <i>“Teen pregnancy”</i> <i>“Pregnant woman is jumped by gang member and loses her baby”</i> <i>“Killing of Allan Hancock student”</i> <i>“Death of two gang members”</i> <i>“Increase of women in gangs”</i> | <i>“Iraqi war”</i> <i>“War on Drugs”</i> <i>“Increase of cocaine and meth”</i> <i>“Racism”.</i> |

The conversation that ensued included the *My Space* websites, children soldiers, and the Columbine shootings. During this discussion one parent said: “Everything is happening a lot faster. You can lose your child a lot quicker!” 9-11 was also discussed and in a powerful statement one man concluded: “No one is immune to that”. Additionally, there was some discussion on the role of technology and consequent desensitization to violence by the mass media. As this discussion evolved tensions rose as a member of the conference expressed his frustration regarding the fact that there was no Spanish translation available at The Future Search Conference. This issue was resolved by way of Santa Maria Councilmember/ Hilda Zacarías agreeing to translate from English-to-Spanish for the duration of the conference. However, this same participant also expressed his concerns regarding the lack of Hispanic families at the Conference as an example of the marginalization of those who are most effected by youth violence. Additionally, this participant expressed his opinion that the youth members at the conference should be given a stronger voice. Ultimately, this dialogue prompted several of the youth participants to voice their concerns. They shared that adults often “undermine them, look down on them, feel stereo-typed by them, and that there are no role models to look to for support.” Although this discussion was uncomfortable it served to break down barriers such as: age, socioeconomics, culture, language, and even gender.

As **Day One** drew to a close, Santa Maria City Councilmember and co-facilitator for the Conference Mike Cordero addressed the ‘Future Search’ youth participants: “By the end of the day I hope you see us as support. This is not an adult issue. This is not a youth issue. This is a community issue. We have to ask ourselves what we can create.”

Lessons Learned: Violence is a loaded word and a word that evokes a wide range of feelings, emotions, memories, and traumas. And in the end, it was apparent that participants were able to vocalize all of this while not saying a word and maintaining a sense of anonymity. They were empowered just by sharing their story. Honoring these stories and fully owning them both on personal levels and community levels initiated the healing process which was essential for the work ahead.

Day Two A.M. - Understanding the Present

While the first day of The Future Search Conference was dedicated to answering the question of “*How did we get here?*” the second and third days were dedicated to answering the questions “*Where are we now?*” and “*What are we going to do about it?*”

Information was shared to inform the participants about the rising trend of violence within the Santa Maria Valley. In the last two years combined, there were five homicides in Santa Maria. In the past year, robberies increased more than 100% with 33 in 2008 and 76 in 2009. Aggravated assault cases almost doubled with 24 in 2008 and 44 in 2009. There are five gangs in Santa Maria with a total estimate of 830 gang members among the five. The five gangs include: Westpark, Northwest, Westland, 18th St. and M.S.

After these statistics were given, the participants came together in a large group and created a “*mind map*.” The *mind map* helps to capture present trends in society- social economic, technological, political, and environmental, that people believe impact youth violence and shape the future. The mind map creates a shared picture and understanding of the world we live in today. Dan Holden’s gentle but empowering facilitating emphasized expression, creativity, and openness to ideas.

Covering the opposite wall of the conference hall where participants on Day One had recorded personal, community, and global stories of violence there was now blank paper and in the center of this paper there was a circle with the words - “Youth Violence in Santa Maria”. Following written input and open discussion, participants came up with seven trends that they believe have had the greatest impact on youth violence within the community. Participants listed the following as the seven trends:

- Poverty
- Media
- Broken Families
- Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- Mental Health
- Lack of Resources
- Parent Awareness

These seven trends were written all around the center circle of the poster paper on the front wall and lines were made forming a web diagram. Participants were then asked to discuss community wide problems associated with violence and to check to see if the problem they had stated fell under any of the seven categories listed in the diagram. For example, a participant shared that she believed a lack of role models could be written under the category of “Broken Families” and another participant believed that Santa Maria’s reliance on punitive measures and no emphasis given on proactive measures fell under the category of “Lack of Resources.” The end product was a web that brought to life the intricacy and complexity of the problem of youth violence. It was clear to see that youth and families of a community rely on the community to function on many different levels. Everything from the low wage of migrant workers to the way in which the media portrays masculinity all play a role in the ability of youth and families to either thrive or struggle.

During this discussion a parent spoke of his concern that society has not only accepted gang culture but has embraced it. This parent said that the gang lifestyle was “in the larger air we breathe.” Parents spoke of how today’s youth do not have the coping skills nor the empathy and compassion needed to relate in positive ways. The adults felt that kids today were living in a materialistic world where there was more of an emphasis on buying things than on getting along with others. The youth in turn responded to these comments by saying: “Adults want to discipline us but none of them want to educate or show us”. One youth participant shared that: “Adults don’t even see us as people. They are scared of us. They have no idea how to relate to us”. Dan concluded this section by thanking the youth for voicing their opinions and emphasized that there is a lot of wisdom and resources in the room but - “It is the youth that is going to drive this all home”.

Following this very intense ‘Mind Mapping’ activity, participants from the ten stakeholder domains (business, non profits, law enforcement, youth, education, faith based, criminal justice, families, government, health care) were told to join their specific groups/tables. Once established these stakeholder groups were asked to: chose some of the trends written on the ‘Mind Map’, identify ways in which they were currently working to address these issues, and identify ways in which they would like to address these issues in the future. Finally, each stakeholder group shared with the conference participants what they had identified as trends they were currently addressing and what they hoped to do in the future.

Examples of this process included:

LAW ENFORCEMENT: The law enforcement group shared that they were currently putting officers in the schools as school resource officers, running DARE & Explorer Club programs, and conducting town hall meetings. Future wants included: expand Restorative Justice, develop a PAL mentor program, expand use

of youth volunteers, and continue to provide all the services they currently are providing while contending with the upcoming budget cuts which may drastically effect their daily operations.

FAITH-BASED: The faith-based group shared that they currently provide parenting classes, run crisis centers, and provide religious ceremony and ritual. They would like to create a greater sense of community by planting community gardens, offering mural projects, doing more for senior citizens, and restoration of 'Respect' towards - Parents, Children, Teachers, & Law Enforcement.

BUSINESS: The business group shared that they currently volunteer in classrooms, ensure their employees have benefits, and appeal to youth in various ways. The business group shared that they feel very strongly that not enough is being done regarding early childhood education. They expressed their desire to sponsor programs like the "Imagination Library", a program run by Dolly Parton in which families receive free books monthly with the agreement that the book will be read together as a family, and help the community coming together to fight drugs.

HEALTH CARE: The Health Care group shared that they currently provide screening, assessments, and intervention for physical as well as mental health needs within the community. Unfortunately, much of this is delivered following acts of abuse or violence. They would like to see immediate mental health follow-up for patients who are treated in the E.R. for injuries related to domestic or street violence. The continued expansion of the 'Restorative Justice' model and supporting all efforts to suppress substance abuse within the Valley is supported. Additionally, more needs to be done with the early detection of childhood academic & social-emotional problems.

NON-PROFITS: The Non-profit group shared that they currently attempt to provide services for "broken families" in the form/s of: recreational resources, counseling services, community networking, etc. Poverty, racism, and the "trauma of victimization" significantly contribute to youth violence within the Valley. They emphasized a need for programs to help educators learn more about cultural diversity and expand awareness of outreach and support agencies within the community. The community-based agencies, (i.e.) non-profits, churches, recreational programs, substance abuse centers need to communicate and work toward "connectedness". This group expressed a strong need for 'Structure' - "Kids rise to expectations and respond to boundaries".

CRIMINAL JUSTICE: The Criminal Justice group shared that they are continuing to work on developing and expanding the 'Restorative Justice' and 'Teen Court' models within the community. Additionally, they are offering a helping hand with youth sport & recreational programs for youngsters across all age ranges. This group saw a distinct need to intercept school truancy and provide parent support services within the early primary school years. The expansion of job skills training for middle school and high school students via such programs as ROP & CTE continues to be a distinct need. The group also expressed a clear need to maintain and expand upon programs for juvenile youth offenders, (i.e.) Los Prietos Boys Camp, CASA, Tattoo removal, Drug & Alcohol recovery, etc.

EDUCATION: The education group shared the need for job training to be provided to high school students who are not college bound. The emphasis on standardized tests was draining the students & the staff and that standardized tests do not acknowledge the whole person as well as all the various types of intelligence. They also stressed a need to maintain the arts, music, and drama - While continuing to articulate with Allan Hancock College & the Regional Occupational Program. Family support in the forms of: parenting classes, after school programs, tutoring, and connecting families to non-profit agencies within the community continues to be a priority for this group.

GOVERNMENT: The government group shared that the relationship between families and public resources are being dramatically impacted by: slashes in budgets, reduction in social services, and 'silo mentality'. Family structure, isolation, and cultural/language barriers continue to have significant impact upon the communities well being. As a potential response to these issues the group saw a need to work on bringing services out to the community as they felt they were currently not as accessible as they would like them to be. Maintaining and possibly expanding existing programs such as: First 5, after school activities via parks & recreation, DARE, PAL, all remain critical to the physical, social, and mental health of all youth.

Day Two P.M. - Turning to the "Future"

It was at this point of the conference that the participants were asked honor the past, accept the present, and turn toward the future. It was also at this point Dan Holden offered a challenge, "are you willing to pay the price for success? You can't fix your way towards a great community. All creative breakthroughs take place with very tight limitations like the relationship between wood & strings in a violin."

Participants were then asked to undergo a major shift in their thinking and take time to envision, imagine, and even pretend! Finally, participants were instructed to imagine that they were now in the year 2015 and living in a Santa Maria Valley where families, businesses, and citizens came to thrive. In fact, this Santa Maria Valley was bustling and had undergone such major transformations that when residents of the Santa Maria Valley traveled to other cities, the residents in those cities stopped in their tracks to talk face to face with the people from that well known region of the Santa Maria Valley where gang and youth violence was eradicated and the Valley was transformed into a community of collaboration, partnership, creativity, and leadership.

The Stakeholder groups reassembled and were directed to continue this imaginative activity. They were asked to imagine that between the years 2010 and 2015, their stakeholder group had played a crucial role in the transformation of the Santa Maria Valley. Then they were to brainstorm and come up with the ways in which their group had contributed to turning the Valley into a bustling, blossoming, and vibrant community. The participants were asked to be as creative and imaginative as possible while staying within the confines of one rule - all strength, resources, and power had to come from "this room alone". This meant that the groups had to create these solutions under the confines of California's disastrous budget crisis (e.g. no new dollars). Each Stakeholder group was then asked to share with the larger group the ways in which they had contributed to the birth of a beautiful bustling Santa Maria Valley in the year 2015.

One stakeholder group shared that in 2015, they were celebrating their successful grassroots campaign to create a sense of community in Santa Maria by using the motto: "*Santa Maria is our Backyard.*" In this scenario, teenagers were designing commercial & public radio programs that supported community awareness and collaboration. With the recognition that technology is not something that is going to go away, this group shared that technology could be used as a positive media source by having daily text messages sent out with volunteer opportunities, recreational programs, and positive messages. This group also made the vital point that the most powerful voice in getting kids to say no to gangs, drugs, and violence is the voice of former gang members themselves. If former gang members are stereotyped, judged, feared, hated, and mistreated, the more likely he or she is to return to the gang which provided security, safety, and acceptance. This stakeholder group understood that gang members and former gang members should not be shunned by our society but invited to share their story and hopefully heal from their pain and find a healthy way to contribute to society. The celebratory way this group envisioned community was inspiring and the way in which their plan utilized technology was innovative.

Another group shared that the way in which they had transformed Santa Maria from 2010 to 2015 was by utilizing the space of the very room they were sitting in. Members of this group felt that the Maldonado Youth Center was an untapped resource full of possibilities. Their plan was to have every participant find three businesses that would each sponsor a youth center day. This would translate into the Youth Center being open for 24 hours a day 365 days a year. This group envisioned the youth center as a hub in which all the resources of the community were given the space to connect, collaborate, and serve. The youth would have a place to join in recreational sports such as swimming, basketball, and soccer. The skateboarding park that would be built would give skateboarders a place to practice skateboarding without being ostracized from the community. Along with recreational sports for the youth, the center would also have dances, cooking classes, and computer classes. For adults, the center would host parenting seminars, gardening classes, and even senior citizen fitness classes.

And, one other stakeholder group shared that they had created CFISM which stood for the Collaborative for Improving Santa Maria which they symbolized using a drawing of a beautiful tree which had seven branches. Each branch symbolized a sector of the community committed to change. There were families for change, government for all, community resources, education counts, faith based services, recreation, and business and commerce. In this vision, each stakeholder group joined a collaborative with the

intention and motivation of creating a thriving Santa Maria with strong roots, proud tall branches, and beautiful healthy leaves.

Day Three A.M. - Setting the Foundation

The final day of the Future Search Conference was dedicated to embracing the common understandings achieved over the previous two days. This new common ground serves as the foundation for shaping short and longer-term action plans for the future. Based on the reports each stakeholder group had shared the previous day seven strategy groups, now renamed '*Clouds*' were organized. The seven '*Clouds*' were then presented to Future Search participants:

- The Education/Awareness/Leadership Development Cloud
- The Community and Culture Media Cloud
- The Youth, Families, and Neighborhood Resource Cloud
- The Maldonado Youth Center Utilization Cloud
- The Restorative Justice and Inclusion Cloud
- The Business Opportunities and Partnership Cloud
- The Government and Public Policy Cloud

Future Search participants were reminded that they had looked at the past to develop a better understanding of the way in which they individually, as well as how their community collectively, had been impacted by violence. They had taken time to assess the present state of the community and it was through this process they had come to see the complexity of youth violence as well as the multifaceted approach needed to address all the layers of the crisis. Participants clearly saw that it was not just government's job to fix the problem of youth violence or that parents simply needed to take back control.

All Future Search participants were asked to form a circle around Dan Holden as he stood next to the easel listing each of the seven Clouds. As Dan walked through a description of each Cloud participants, those who resonated with the work of that Cloud, were invited to form a smaller circle within the larger one. Once this Cloud was formed Dan asked its participants to make a commitment to each other then turn around and make a similar commitment to the group at large. Immediately after this process was completed Cloud members selected leaders and contact information was exchanged in preparation for follow-up working sessions over the weeks and months to come.

The Future Search journey had begun. Participants had come to realize that a community is like a physical body in that it relies on each of its parts to function to the best of its ability. The three-day conference also resulted in participants recognizing that growth, leadership, and collaboration can occur organically without force, persuasion, or control tactics. It was in the spirit of this attitude many new friendships were made, collaborative relationships were established, and a large number of participants shared that they had never experienced such a productive and proactive assembly. One participant reported: "I am excited about this. This is looking at the problems in a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated way. The Maldonado Youth Center is a physical structure but it symbolizes so much more now."

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" - Margaret Meade. The Santa Maria Future Search Conference is a testimony to this quote.

Epilogue

Karl Popper, the great philosopher of science, once divided the world into two categories: clocks and clouds. "Clocks are neat orderly systems that can be solved through reductions... Clouds are an epistemic mess - highly irregular, disorderly, and more or less unpredictable". And, according to Jonah Lehrer/ 'The Neuroscience of Failure': "The mistake of modern science is to pretend that everything is a clock, which is why we get seduced again and again by the false promises of brain scanners and gene sequences. We want to believe we will understand nature if we find the exact right tool to cut its joints. But that approach is doomed to failure. *We live in a universe not of clocks but of clouds.*"