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Mapping Out-of-School Time Resources for East Palo Alto and Belle Haven Youth

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Background

In 2009, community leaders working with youth in the City of East Palo Alto (EPA) and the Belle Haven neighborhood in the City of Menlo Park approached the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University to understand better out-of-school time opportunities for youth.¹ Past research has strongly linked participation in out-of-school time programs to improved academic outcomes,² enhanced social development,³ and increased civic engagement for youth.⁴ The EPA/Belle Haven community has a high number of youth facing multiple risk factors as well as a deep tradition of community service, resulting in a dense network of youth-serving organizations in a community that covers a total of approximately three square miles. The group of leaders highlighted the importance of engaging youth in out-of-school activities to promote positive youth outcomes and wondered why, in a community with so many programs and youth-serving agencies, did it seem that many youth were disconnected from those services. In response, the JGC convened this group and collaborated with them to answer their questions.

Data and Analysis Methods

The EPA/Belle Haven Youth Asset Mapping Project aimed to answer three questions:

1. What programs are available to youth in the East Palo Alto and Belle Haven communities, and where are there gaps or duplication in available services?
2. How do available services overlap with the availability and interests of youth?
3. What factors inhibit or facilitate accessing the services available to local youth?

To answer the first question about program availability and overlaps, the JGC gathered information on the content, locations, times, target audiences, and costs of programs by interviewing program leaders; this was important because there was no single, central place that housed information on all available programs. In considering the scope of the

¹ Community partners included: Andres Connell (Nuestra Casa), Leif Erickson (Youth Community Service), Julio Garcia (One EPA), Goro Mitchell (Community Development Institute), Gail Ortega (community youth services advocate), and Heather Starnes (For Youth by Youth).

² Vandell, D. L., Reisner, E. R., and Pierce, K. M (2007). *Outcomes linked to high-quality afterschool programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising afterschool programs*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

³ Morrissey, K. M., & Werner-Wilson, R. J. (2005). The relationship between out-of-school activities and positive youth development: An investigation of the influences of communities and families. *Adolescence*, 40, 67-85.

⁴ Kirshner, B., Strobel, K., & Fernandez, M. (2003). Critical Civic Engagement Among Urban Youth. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 2(1).

project, partners decided to include both EPA and Belle Haven because youth from both communities attend Ravenswood City School District schools as well as several programs that serve both communities. Partners decided to focus only on middle and high school-aged youth because those are the ages when youth typically disengage from school.⁵

To answer the second question of youth needs and interests, the JGC designed a survey on youth’s out-of-school time activities and trained a group of six EPA youth to administer the survey. The youth surveyed 77 young people ages 12 to 18 in the community, asking questions about out-of-school-time program participation, barriers to participation, and desired service components. The surveys also asked respondents to geographically map out their daily activities to study how location, crime, and transportation were related to youths’ choices of how they spend free time. Although we strived to survey a representative sample of youth in the community, we did not have equal representation of youth from all neighborhoods, ages, and gender groups because youth survey takers were limited to the respondents they found while canvassing hang-out spots. Therefore, the results from this survey should be regarded as exploratory as the survey sample is not representative of youth across the community.

To examine the third question about factors that inhibit or facilitate participation, we overlaid bus routes from the four San Mateo County Transit (Samtrans) lines that serve EPA and Belle Haven, crime data obtained from the East Palo Alto Police Department, and locations of out-of-school time programs to understand if transportation or safety played a role in program access. Using Geographic Information System (GIS) software, we mapped the location of violent or drug- and alcohol-related crimes over the last six months, aggregated at the block level, to identify crime hot spots in the community.

Program Availability

When this research was conducted in mid-2010, there was a high volume of agencies and programs serving youth in EPA and Belle Haven. Our search uncovered 93 agencies that administer over 150 programs or services to the approximately 6,250 middle- to high school-aged youth within this community, a finding that surprised even partners who had been working in the community for many years. We were able to collect detailed data from 100 programs. Note that we did not include programs serving younger children. Exhibit 1 shows the number of programs organized by content area and target age group. Many programs included more than one content category and may be counted in the table.

Exhibit 1: Number of Programs by Content and Enrollment Targeting

	School-Based	Open Enrollment	Middle School	High School	Both HS and MS	Total
Academic	8	24	12	13	7	32
Sports	2	23	15	2	8	25
Arts and Music	4	9	4	6	3	13
Community Service	6	4	5	2	3	10
Recreational	0	11	5	1	5	11
Youth Leadership	3	6	2	4	3	9
Health Services/Education	6	3	1	4	4	9
Faith-Based	0	8	2	2	4	8
Mentoring	5	1	2	3	1	6
Technology or Vocational	1	5	2	1	3	6

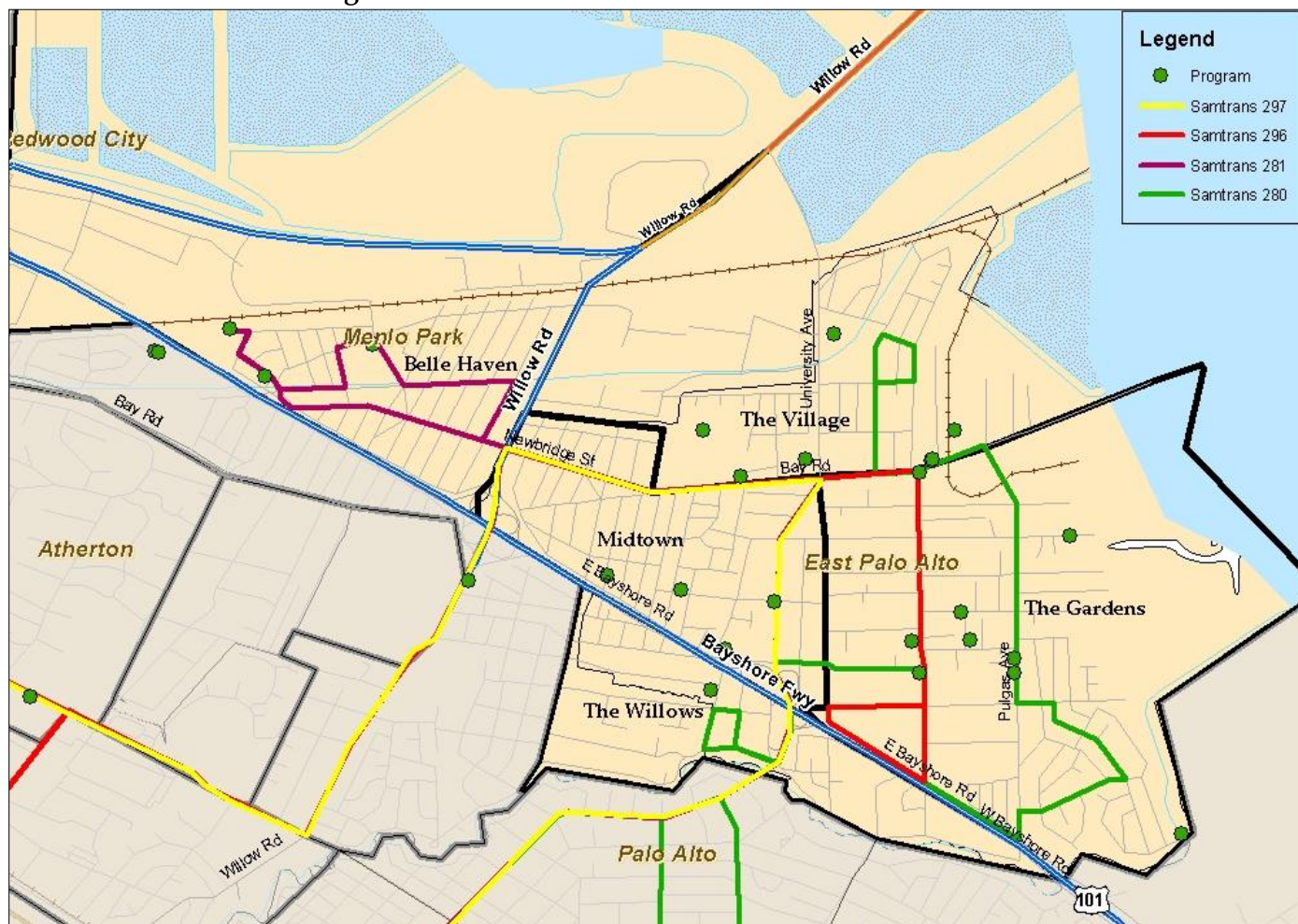
⁵ Wigfield, A., Eccles, J. S., Schiefele, U., Roeser, R., & Davis-Kean, P. (2006). Development of achievement motivation. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development* (6th ed., pp. 933–1002). New York: Wiley.

Despite the large number of available programs and services, there still were some areas of need. Many providers offered academic, sports, and recreation programs, and most were not limited to youth who attended a specific school. However, the number of sports opportunities declined substantially for high school students compared to middle school students. There were also fewer recreational opportunities available for high school-aged youth compared to middle school-aged youth. In addition, fewer programs operated on weekends than during the week, and very few programs were available after 8 pm on any day of the week.

Alignment between Program Supply and Youth Demand

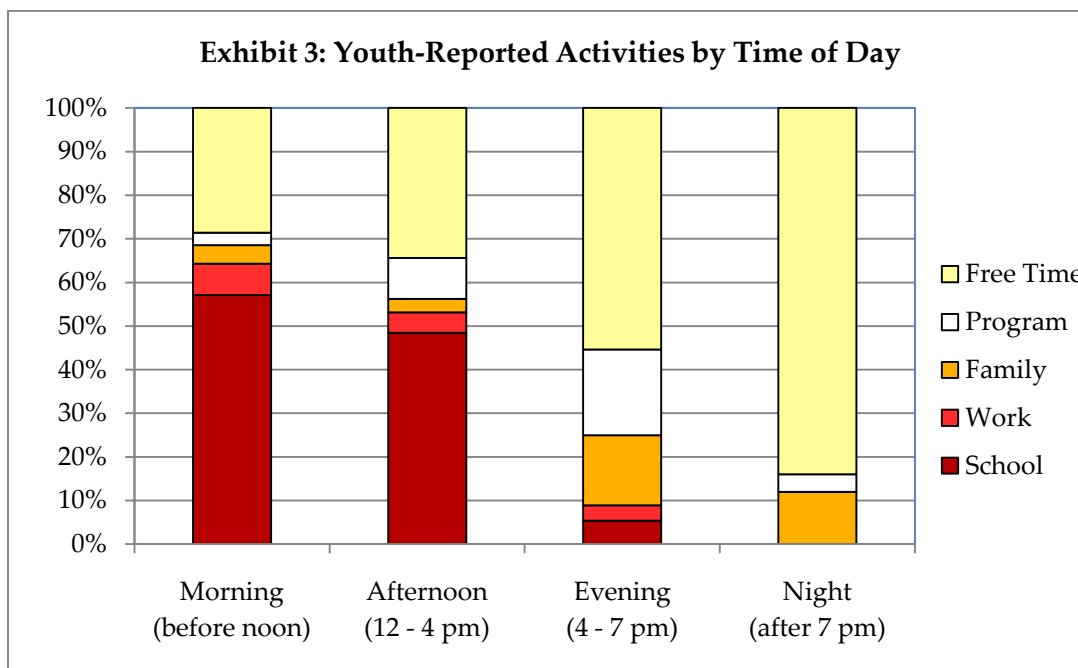
One important consideration in understanding the alignment between program availability and youth access is the location of programs. As Exhibit 2 shows, the Village and Gardens neighborhoods of EPA have the most programs, and there are two main areas that had few services – the area of EPA west of Freeway 101 and the border area around Willow Road between EPA and Belle Haven. Examining survey answers about out-of-school time locations, we found that youth overwhelmingly tended to stay within their home neighborhood. It is hard to know whether this is because of transportation, safety, or some other factor, but if this trend holds beyond the survey sample, it is potentially most problematic for youth who live in the two geographic areas with the fewest number of youth services.

Exhibit 2: Program Locations and Transit Lines in East Palo Alto and Belle Haven



Note: There are programs located outside the community that target EPA and Belle Haven youth as well as programs that do not have a fixed location that do not appear on this map. Also, several locations house multiple programs. Therefore, the number of programs indicated on the map is not equal to the total number of programs available.

Another important consideration is the match between times that youth are available and times that programs are available. Exhibit 3 shows responses to a set of survey questions asking youth to map their activities on a given day. A key finding is that many youth reported having free time at night. This corroborates the finding from the program data that indicate a lack of programs at night.



Note: Surveys represent both weekends and weekdays and youth who were on summer break as well as youth attending school at the time.

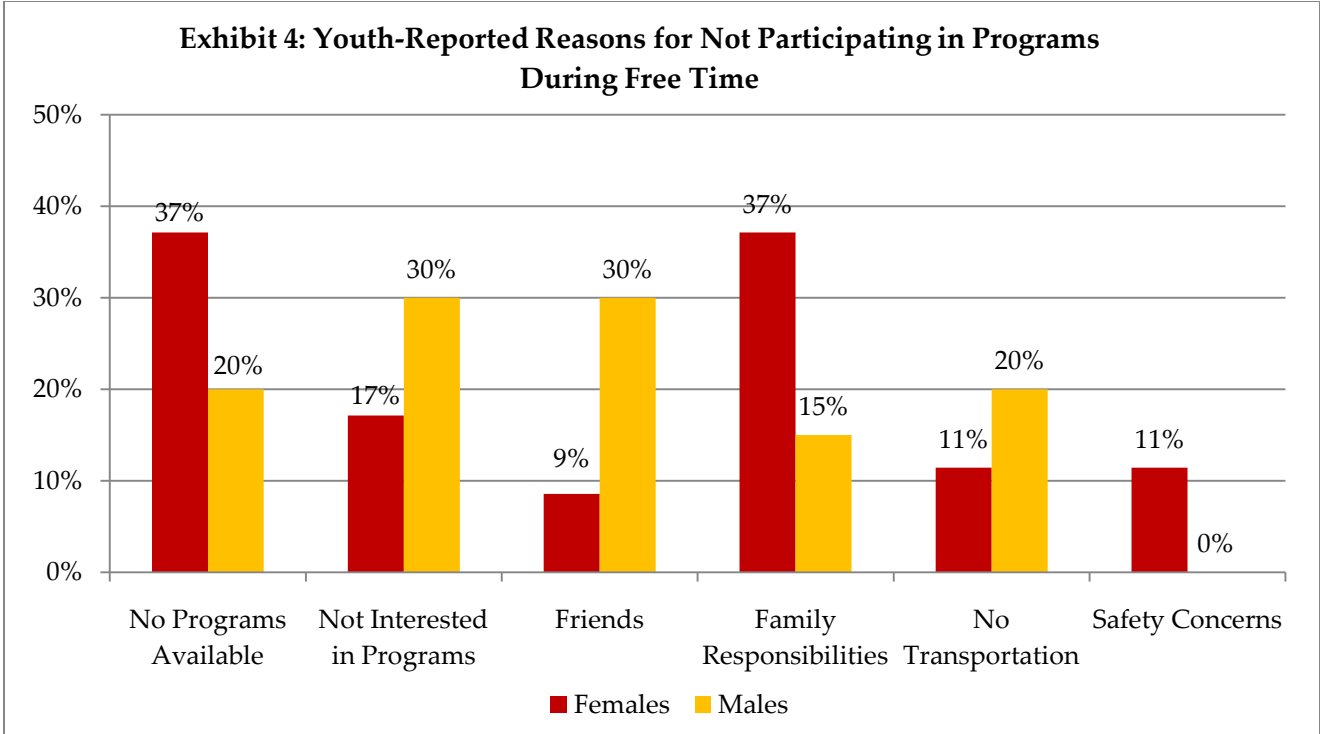
Finally, the survey data suggest that there may be some mismatch between youth interests and program availability. When asked what programs youth would like to have, 46% of respondents reported wanting programs related to arts or music. This was by far the most common response, and yet there was a relatively low number of arts and music opportunities in the program data gathered. The next most common response was sports programs, for which we also found greater interest than availability, followed by safe spaces to drop-in and socialize, of which there are few.

Program Access and Barriers to Participation

About 80% of the youth surveyed reported involvement in at least one out-of-school time program. The types of programs most youth reported participating in were community youth groups, school-based after-school programs, and community service opportunities. We found that female respondents were significantly more likely than males to report participating in programs at community centers and on weekends.⁶ Females were also significantly less likely to report having had free time in the evening. Also, about 20% of high school-aged youth reported participating in either in-school or out-of-school sports programs compared to over 40% of middle school-aged youth. This is consistent with the finding in the previous section of fewer sports opportunities for high school youth. Again, findings from the survey sample may not be representative of the whole community, but the results indicate patterns worth further exploration.

⁶ We used t-tests throughout this report to determine whether differences between subgroups are significant. Any difference noted as significant means that there was a systematic, non-random difference between subgroups.

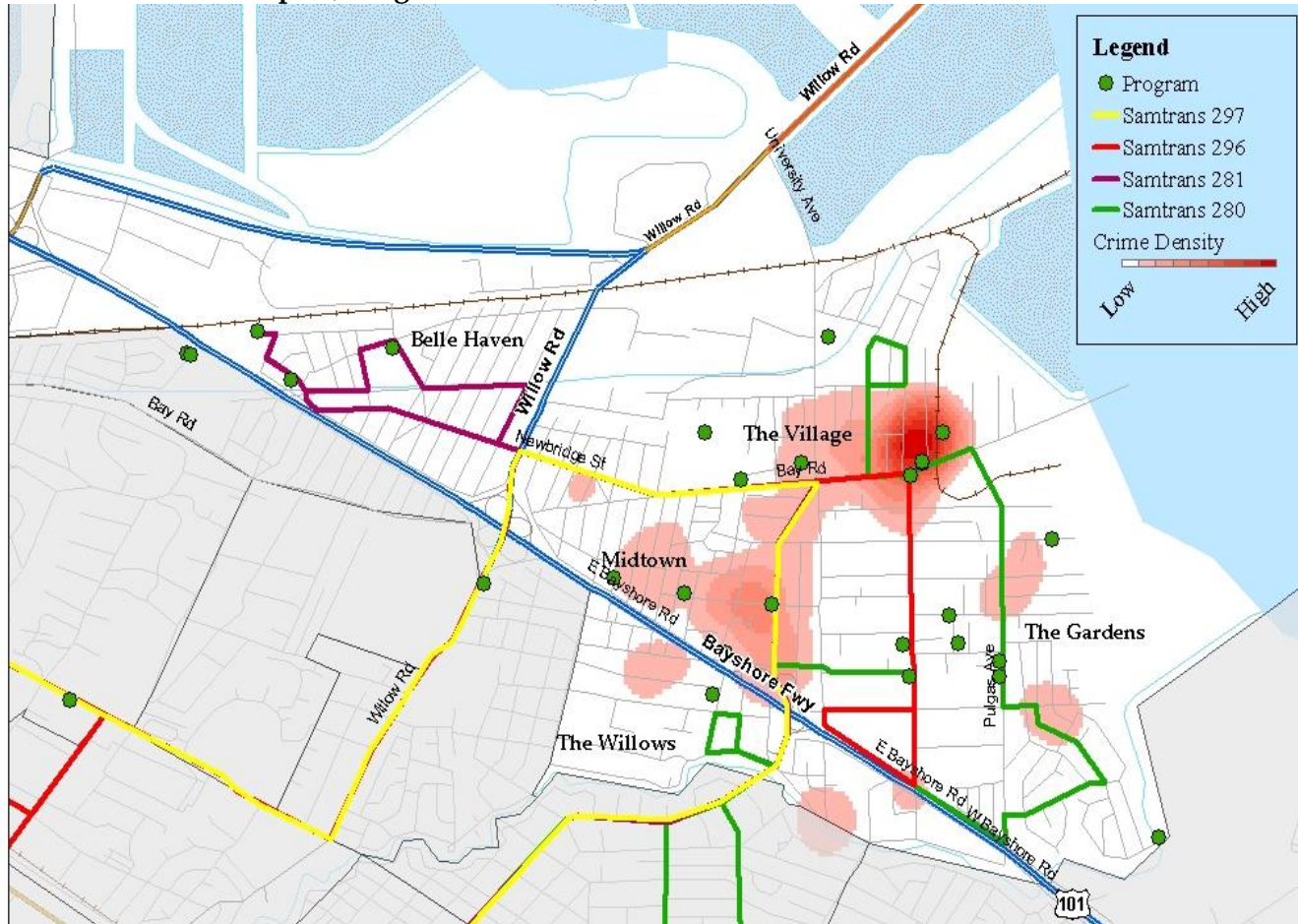
The most common reasons youth survey respondents cited for not participating in programs were family responsibilities—doing chores or taking care of younger siblings—and no programs being available during their free times (Exhibit 4). Females were significantly more likely than males among the youth we surveyed to cite family responsibilities as a reason for not participating in programs. Finally, males were significantly more likely than females to cite wanting to hang out with friends as a reason for not participating in programs.



Safety, Transportation, and Program Access

Project partners hypothesized that neighborhood safety and access to transportation could be factors that keep youth from going to programs, particularly after dark. However, very few youth specified safety (5 out of the 71 who answered the question) or lack of transportation (10 out of 71) as a reason for not being involved in organized activities. Using crime data from the EPA Police Department and transit routes mapped onto program locations, we were able to look more deeply into the relationship between these factors and program access. As Exhibit 5 shows, two areas that house few services—the Willow Road corridor between Belle Haven and East Palo Alto and the Willows neighborhood—also have high crime spots near them, suggesting that youth living in these areas may be at the biggest disadvantage because they would need to pass through crime hotspots to get to either programs or transit. However, we found no significant differences between youth survey respondents who lived near a crime hotspot (defined here as five or more crimes within one-tenth of a mile of the home during the last six months) compared with students in relatively safer areas in their responses to any reason for not participating in programs. It is possible that youth thought of safety in terms of other issues, including lack of transportation to get through unsafe neighborhoods, or that they equated not having access to transportation or not being allowed by parents to walk through crime hotspots with nothing being available.

Exhibit 5: Crime Hotspots, Program Locations, and Transit Lines in East Palo Alto



Note: Several locations house multiple programs, and some programs do not have a fixed location. Therefore, the number of programs indicated on the map is not equal to the total number of programs available.

Access to Information about Programs

The data indicated that another important barrier to program access might be lack of information. During informal discussions, youth and parents said that they were not aware of the array of programs available to them, and the survey data support this observation. As shown in Exhibit 4, when asked why they did not spend their free time at a program, one of the most frequent responses was that there were no programs available at the time. Considering the large number of programs, this finding indicates a possible information gap about available opportunities. Survey data also emphasized the role of social networks in learning about programs. Friends (66%), family (57%), and school (55%) were by far the biggest source of information about programs for youth. Many fewer youth said that they had learned about programs from fliers, newspaper ads, or the internet. Reliance on social networks could be a limiting factor for the many new immigrants and highly mobile families within EPA and Belle Haven.

Implications and Next Steps

By combining data on program availability and locations, youth perspectives, and logistical factors, this report provides a basis for understanding how these factors interact to facilitate or inhibit access to services and programs for youth in East Palo Alto and Belle Haven. As we have noted throughout this report, the data and findings presented here are not comprehensive or conclusive. Rather, they are meant to simply show the landscape of youth resources and explore possible issues in program access.

Despite the exploratory nature of this study, the analyses point to several potential interventions that could help to improve program access for youth and more broadly inform youth-serving groups in other communities. Having found so many youth resources suggests that linking youth to programs and services may have as much to do with realigning existing services as adding new ones. Following are two strategies that might improve program access:

1. *Address barriers to participation:* Many of the barriers to participation examined in this report involve factors outside programs' direct control, but there are still ways that service providers can help facilitate youth participation. Possible strategies to address the main barriers found in this report—family responsibilities and lack of information about programs—may include:
 - *Provide opportunities for multiple age groups in one location.* Some programs have overcome the challenge of family responsibilities preventing youth participation by offering different programs for multiple ages in one location. This may facilitate participation for older youth by allowing them to bring younger siblings under their care.
 - *Publicize available opportunities to the community using a variety of avenues.* Findings suggest that social networks are the primary way in which youth become connected to programs, but few youth reported learning about programs through broadcast media like posters, newspaper, or the internet. One strategy that research has shown to be effective in engaging new families is utilizing parents to reach out to other parents. Also, there are opportunities to use networking in combination with broadcast media to spread information among youth. For example, we have heard from youth about programs successfully using social networking sites, such as Facebook, for spreading word about programs directly to and among youth.
2. *Partner across agencies to fill gaps:* Even with so many service providers, there are gaps to be filled and areas of need for which there are few available programs, such as arts and music. In a time of limited resources, service providers may consider collaborating and coordinating with organizations that provide needed services instead of seeking to fill gaps by adding new programs. For example, programs may be able to coordinate timing or share program space to make their programs accessible to more youth, connect the youth that they already serve to additional services, or fill geographic gaps.

The data and findings from this report will inform community efforts in several ways. First, the JGC has developed an online tool that will allow users and providers to search for programs. The tool, available at <http://jgcnet.stanford.edu>, provides a centralized repository of information for parents looking for opportunities for their children, youth themselves, service providers looking for partners to refer youth they serve, or community leaders thinking about community-wide youth service planning and policy. In addition, the JGC and partners will use the data collected and lessons learned through this project to inform planning at the community level through existing cross-agency groups focused on youth services.

Finally, the process and methods behind this report could be employed by other communities struggling with similar issues. This analysis shows how using mapping software to analyze spatial data could inform programming in a way that accounts for logistical factors like distance, transportation, and safety. Additionally, the process of gathering data across service providers in a community, although difficult and time consuming, can be a valuable resource to a community as it thinks strategically about filling gaps and collaborating to make the best use of available resources to improve outcomes for youth.

Acknowledgements

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East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy
East Palo Alto Youth Court
East Palo Alto Library
East Palo Alto Police Department
East Palo Alto Tennis and Tutoring
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Girls for a Change
Girls on the Run
Haas Center for Public Service
Kiwanis Club
Mural Music and Arts Project
One East Palo Alto
Onetta Harris Center
Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center
Peninsula Interfaith Action
Project WeHOPE
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