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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Santa Cruz County Leaders Unite to Strengthen Child Welfare and Prevention Systems

Children's Network Symposium centers youth voice and early support for families

Santa Cruz, CA – Youth advocates, child welfare leaders, educators, and community organizations across Santa Cruz County will convene March 5, 2026, for the Children's Network Symposium: Building a Stronger Future for Children and Families, a countywide event focused on prevention, early intervention, and strengthening the systems that protect children and stabilize families.

Held from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Twin Lakes Church, the symposium reflects a growing shift toward prevention-first strategies that support families before crises occur. The event brings together cross-sector partners to advance collaboration in child welfare, behavioral health, youth diversion, and integrated care.

Participants will explore practical tools and emerging models that move beyond reactive systems toward coordinated, relationship-based community support. A featured session examines how mandated reporters and service providers can connect families to help earlier, reducing harm and strengthening long-term stability. Breakout sessions spotlight youth leadership pathways, behavioral health partnerships, and prevention strategies designed to keep young people connected, safe, and supported.

Attendees will also participate in interactive panels, collaborative workshops, and a gallery walk, inviting agencies to commit to shared action. Resource tabling will connect families and providers to local supports, including a spotlight on United Way's 2-1-1 helpline, which links residents to housing, behavioral health, and family services.

The symposium is organized in partnership with Family and Children's Services within the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department and reflects a shared countywide commitment to child welfare innovation. Youth voice is embedded throughout the day, including spoken word performances, youth-led sessions, and closing reflections from young community leaders.

"This symposium represents the future of child welfare in our county," said Yvette Brooks, CEO of United Way Santa Cruz County. "We know families are strongest when support comes early and

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communities work together. I am grateful to live in a county that invests in prevention, collaboration, and youth leadership. This event brings the people doing the work into one room to strengthen partnerships and build a system that truly protects and uplifts our young people.”

Partnering with the United way for this symposium helps us further immerse ourselves in collaborations with our valued prevention partners,” notes Dr. Gloria Carroll, Director of the County Human Services’ Family and Children’s Services Division. “The family support strategy will truly help us engage at-risk families to prevent crises and the need for deeper child welfare interventions.”

The Children’s Network Symposium serves as both a professional learning opportunity and a public call to action: strengthen prevention, support families early, and ensure every child in Santa Cruz County grows up safe and connected.

Space is limited. Registration required:

Contact:

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