



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, April 7, 2017

CONTACT: BILEN MESFIN (510) 681-5978 bilen@change-llc.com
KARI IDA (916) 591-1615 kida@sierrahealth.org

\$1.3 Million Granted to Transform Juvenile Justice Practice and Policy Across California

Positive Youth Justice Initiative enters next phase: Organizing for a Healthy Justice System

Sacramento and Los Angeles – Today, The Center announced \$1.3 million investment through the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI). PYJI will shift its focus from engaging large systems to providing support to coalitions of nonprofit community based advocates in 11 counties across the state. The initiative aims to accelerate a statewide movement toward a more youth development and trauma informed juvenile justice system. The selected PYJI agencies and their direct-action local partners are working with youth, families and communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by the juvenile justice system to develop local policy agendas and a stronger, more cohesive constituency that can advocate for system transformation. Full list of grantee organizations listed [here](#).

“If California is to retain its position as a leader in juvenile justice transformation, it is the communities most impacted – low income and communities of color – that must shape the next series of policy changes,” said Chet P. Hewitt, President and CEO, Sierra Health Foundation and The Center. “For it is their children who are overrepresented, underserved and largely held back once engaged in a system that should but far too often fails to support them.”

The investment was announced at the first *Organizing for a Healthy Justice System* convening, which brought together grantee organizations along with philanthropy leaders and advocates to strengthen connections and build collaboration, and to identify policy opportunities for advocacy and organizing. Among other speakers, participants heard from Carmen Perez, a noted leader in juvenile justice policy advocacy and co-chair of the Women’s March on Washington.

The PYJI is helping communities transform juvenile justice practice and policy across California. In 2015, Black youth in California were 7.7 times more likely than their white counterparts to be incarcerated, according to analysis done by the W. Hayward Burns Institute. Latino youth were 2.6 times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated. PYJI aims to not only drastically improve the lives of the state’s most vulnerable youth, but to increase public safety, create pathways to opportunity, and reverse the tremendous social and economic costs of the current juvenile justice systems’ failures. By taking a systems change approach, the initiative strives to address underlying trauma and disconnections so that vulnerable youth can successfully transition to adulthood.

In this new phase, PYJI is deepening investments in communities, grassroots organizations, youth and family members most impacted by the juvenile justice system. The nonprofit organizations have led the call against the mass incarceration of communities of color to end the school-to-prison pipeline and to address the racial disparities found throughout the system. In addition, these new voices speak powerfully about the real life experiences of being engaged in a system that is far too punitive toward youth of color and frequently lacks an understanding of the developmental needs of young people.

The PYJI is funded by Sierra Health Foundation, The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation, and is managed by The Center. To learn more, visit: www.shfcenter.org/positive-youth-justice-initiative.

###

The Center works to promote health and racial equity in communities throughout California with local, state and national partners. www.shfcenter.org

Sierra Health Foundation forges new paths to promote health and racial equity in partnership with communities, organizations and leaders www.sierrahealth.org

The California Endowment is a private, statewide health foundation with a mission to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. www.calendow.org

The California Wellness Foundation is a private, independent foundation with a mission to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention. Since its founding in 1992, the foundation has awarded 8,634 grants totaling more than \$986 million. www.calwellness.org

The **Zellerbach Family Foundation** serves as a catalyst for constructive social change by initiating and investing in efforts that strengthen families and communities. www.zff.org