

November 2010



Challenging Assumptions, Revealing Community Cultural Wealth: Young Adult Wisdom on Hope in Hardship

Rebeca Burciaga, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
San José State University

Nancy Erbstein, Ph.D.
Department of Human and Community Development

Center for Regional Change
University of California, Davis
One Shields Ave, 1309 Hart Hall
Davis, CA 95616
530.751.8799
<http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu>

HYHR2010-11

 The
California
Endowment


SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION
An Endowment for Northern California

UCDAVIS
CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

This Working Paper is a product of Healthy Youth/ Healthy Regions, a collaborative partnership of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, Sierra Health Foundation and The California Endowment. Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions was commissioned and funded by Sierra Health Foundation with additional funding from The California Endowment to document the connections between youth well-being and regional prosperity in the nine-county Capital Region of Northern California.

Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions produced a series of twelve related Working Papers. These papers can be accessed via the Center for Regional Change website: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/hyhr/main>

Published By: Center for Regional Change
University of California, Davis
One Shields Ave, 1309 Hart Hall
Davis, CA 95616
530.751.8799

Copyright: 2010 UC Davis Center for Regional Change

Citation Information:

Burciaga, Rebecca, and Nancy Erbsstein. 2010. *Challenging Assumptions, Revealing Community Cultural Wealth: Young Adult Wisdom on Hope in Hardship*. Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions Working Paper. Center for Regional Change, UC Davis

This working paper focuses on the experiences of 16 young adults between the ages of 17 and 22 living in California's 9-county Capital Region. Each of these young adults left, or considered leaving, high school; of those who completed high school before the end of our interviews, five of six did so through non-traditional means, such as a GED program. We build upon a community cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) to discuss both the challenges faced and resources utilized by young adults interviewed in the Capital Region. Findings suggest these young adults negotiate multiple contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Cooper, in preparation) in their daily lives throughout the region. While they are affected by broad patterns of disparities in support and opportunity, the young adults interviewed shared strategies of resistance and suggestions for social change. To better understand and address youth well being, it is imperative that we include their voices in our quest for a healthy region.

To this end, this paper offers an overview of youth experiences based on *testimonio* interviews¹ conducted with the young adults who helped us understand the state of youth well being. In addition, the appendices include edited versions of three *testimonio* counterstories. All names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants. This paper highlights the interconnectedness of hope and hardship, highlighting resources and values often overlooked among the young adult participants, their families and communities.

¹ The young adult participants in these *testimonio* interviews were not selected in connection with any other elements of the larger Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions study, such as the youth participatory action research projects and the youth social media forum. Youth described and quoted here did not participate in these other project elements, although young people across the Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions study shared many similar insights.

Theoretical Framework: Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth is a theoretical framework informed by empirical research that foregrounds values and resources cultivated by marginalized² communities that influence persistence and social mobility. Such resources and values are often overlooked in research focusing on traditional notions of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). While cultural capital is an important construct to understand power, privilege, and social mobility, it is often applied in ways that frame communities of color and other marginalized populations as merely deficient and that obscure forms of capital which are produced and employed in ways that promote persistence and mobility.

A community cultural wealth framework shifts the lens of research to focus on the various cultural knowledges, skills, and abilities nurtured by families and communities that influence persistence and social mobility, often in the face of significant obstacles. Yosso (2005) has identified six types of community cultural wealth:

- Resistant Capital: challenge inequity and subordination
- Navigational Capital: maneuvering social institutions
- Social Capital: networks and community resources
- Linguistic Capital: communications in different languages or styles
- Familial Capital: cultural and/or family knowledges and history
- Aspirational Capital: aspirations and hope despite challenges

These six forms of capital are not static. Rather, they are fluid in nature and many examples of community cultural wealth demonstrate various forms of capital. Community cultural wealth values and resources were rich in our work with youth and young adults. While many of these values and resources were already present within families and communities, others were created as protective measures against the absence of consistent access to quality education, health and social services. The strong presence of community cultural wealth among these participants complicates predominant views of “dropouts” as disconnected and apathetic. Instead, these findings of community cultural wealth position these young adults as contributing members of society who have not had equal access to opportunities. To surface community cultural wealth, we used the methodology and method of *testimonio*.

Methodology

The *testimonio* interview sample is comprised of 16 young adults between the ages of 18-24 who left high school before graduating. Participants were recruited through a purposive sampling method. We connected with participants living in the Capital Region through contact with adults who were

² While Yosso’s theory of Community cultural wealth focused primarily on the wealth of Communities of Color, this working paper extends this concept to marginalized communities and considers socioeconomic class, sexuality, and gender as standpoints through which Community cultural wealth is also developed.

considered (by community members) to be close allies to young adults who had “dropped out” or considered leaving high school without graduating. The experiences of the following groups are represented (but not representative of their group): African American, Latina/o, Southeast Asian American, Native American, white, LGBTQI, 1st generation and 2nd generation immigrants, parents, foster, and some with former experience with the juvenile justice system. About half of the students have reconnected with schools to pursue certification including Certificates of Proficiency or GEDs. All 16 participants experienced movement throughout and/or beyond the Capital Region.

This study used the method of *testimonio* to document the experiences of these young adults. *Testimonio* is a qualitative method developed in Latin America that incorporates the political, social, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences. *Testimonio* is similar to oral history, yet involves the participant in a critical theoretical reflection of personal, political, spiritual, and intellectual understandings of self and community. *Testimonio*, then, provides an epistemic lens to support an analytical inquiry of experiences within larger social contexts such as those outlined by Healthy Youth Healthy Regions: education, health, civic engagement, employment, and the built environment (Benmayor, 1988; Burciaga, R. 2007; Burciaga, R., et al., 2008; Negron-Gonzales, 2009; Partnoy, 2006; & The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

The *testimonio* interviews were conducted in three phases across three meetings. The first phase began with a *testimonio* interview and mapping or drawing exercise (Lynch, 1960) on youth perceptions of their environment and ended with a demographic interview questionnaire. Each participant was given a disposable camera to take photographs of places or things in the area that were important to their life-stories. The second phase, a *testimonio* interview and mapping exercise, focused on their school experiences from pre-school to the present. The final, third phase, a



Youth Voices for Change

testimonio interview about their life in the area they live in³, included a mapping exercise, photographs they took, and a discussion of their future aspirations. Each participant was given a total of \$75 in Target gift cards for their participation in the study and invited to participate in future work with Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions. All participants were interested in continuing their participation.

Testimonios were coded for two purposes using two methods. One purpose of coding was to explore young people’s experiences of support, or lack thereof, in the areas of education, work, civic engagement and

health. In addition, we were interested in being able to compare young people’s responses to the characterizations of adult interviewees (e.g. to look at how young adults described experiences of healthcare in comparison to how adult allies spoke of healthcare for youth). For this purpose, *testimonios* were first coded using NVivo8, a software program for coding qualitative data.

In our review of the transcripts, we noticed that their *testimonios* countered dominant descriptions

³ The *testimonio* interviews will use “the area they live in” as a proxy for looking at how the Sacramento Capital Region is conceptualized by youth as a geography.

of “dropouts” as youth who are apathetic and lacking life-goals; they also framed school persistence as not merely a matter of individual experience, but broader social and systemic factors. We became interested in constructing, to the extent possible, first-person narratives that capture this nuanced “counterstory” of their school-leaving experience. To this end, all 16 *testimonio* transcripts were also coded by hand into an analysis matrix using Microsoft Word. This analysis matrix focused on five areas:

- The terms drop-out vs. push-out,
- Stereotypes of dropouts in comparison to their own experiences
- Factors contributing to leaving school
- Current schooling status and aspirations
- Prominent forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005)

To date, from this analysis, three participants’ transcripts (roughly 120 pages) have been revisited and quotes reflecting the analyses were pulled and organized into a story-like format (7-10 pages). Each counterstory is roughly 95% original transcript. Participants whose *testimonio* counterstory appears in the final report were contacted again and sent a draft version for their approval. The interviewer reviewed each *testimonio* counterstory with participants, shared where their voices may appear in the future (e.g. reports, publications, and news stories), and asked about concerns or questions. The participant and interviewer then edited the *testimonio* counterstory for accuracy.⁴ Sema’j and Angelica’s *testimonio* counterstories have been reviewed and approved by the participant. We have been unable to reach Audrey, so her *testimonio* counterstory did not benefit from her review. This working paper will draw from both of the above analysis processes to discuss the production and use of community cultural wealth in the Capital Region.

Community Cultural Wealth

By many societal measures these young adults would not be considered successful. All have struggled with schooling, many have experienced abuse, some struggle with drug dependencies, and a few have been incarcerated. Yet, by listening closely to the *testimonios*, we can begin to see the wealth present within these young adults and the communities they live in. We begin this exploration with a look at the six forms of community cultural wealth: resistant capital, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and aspirational capital.

⁴ Sema’j made three small clarifications to the final version.

Resistant Capital

To possess and use resistant capital means to challenge inequity and subordination.⁵ For example, when asked to describe common stereotypes of dropouts and discuss these in comparison to their own lives, all 16 participants resisted common stereotypes including lacking intelligence and lacking motivation. Among the most prevalent of findings in this work, these young adults resisted the notion that they had dropped out of school and were therefore failures.

... the whole stereotypical, 'you're a dropout so you'll never amount to nothing,' I think that's all crap because I look at it like a bigger picture because there's hope for all of us. – Edward

Edward's challenge to the assumption that dropouts "do not amount to anything" and assertion that there is hope for everyone demonstrates a form of resistant capital. His statement also asserts that as individuals, students who leave school are more than who they are often stereotyped to be – people who will not succeed in life. Resistant capital enables Edward to reclaim hope in the midst of hopelessness not just for himself but for "all of us."



Youth Voices for Change

While the term "dropout"⁶ evokes the sense of a sudden leave, all 16 young adults resist the idea of an impulsive departure and describe leaving (or considering leaving) high school as a process. Indeed, multiple factors contribute to leaving school and the *testimonios* document many examples (see, Breslau et al., 2010, as well as Sema'j, Angelica, and Audrey's *testimonio* counterstories). All 16 participants told a story of their departure that included factors inside and outside of school. For example, while Angelica remembered the exact date she disenrolled, "March 10, 2009," she chronicled many challenges including years of movement with her family outside of and within the Capital Region, her family's dependence on her for childcare, and the difficulties she and her family faced securing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for her parents in school and in the cities they lived. Despite challenges, all 16 participants shared examples of attempts to complete school.

Given their understanding of the gradual process of school departure, this resistance to the term dropout as a description may be because, in their experiences, dropping out of school was not a sudden decision. Leaving school was not depicted as giving up but rather a pause, enabling them to take care of challenges they faced outside of school. Often times, this pause enabled them to return to their education at different schools.

⁵ For more on youth experiences of inequity, please see other Healthy Youth/Healthy Region Working Papers and London & Erbstein et al., 2010.

⁶ The term dropout was used sparingly by the participants and possibly only because this study suggested it as one of many terms (including pushout) that described their status of high school completion.

Similar to resisting terminology, participants also resisted static notions of people and space as well as treatment they received for living in certain communities. For example, Dao and Angie spoke at length about assumptions people make about ghettos and the communities living there.

People would look at you like, 'all you know is the streets' or basically, 'all you know is how to sell drugs' or something. People look at you like that. If they know you're from a certain area or if they know you didn't finish school they automatically think you grown up in a bad place. - Angie

Both Dao and Angie resisted these common perceptions of the communities they lived in and instead spoke about what they had gained by living in communities that are often denigrated by society.

I would describe myself as coming from like a different neighborhood, I'm very proud of where I come from because it kind of makes me you know more, be stronger, more prepared. I kind of know more things since things weren't handed to me. So I don't really like the word ghetto but I would just say I came from a different type of neighborhood. [. . .] I love the fact that where I grew up . . . you didn't have to have a certain thing to hang out with this person or you could basically come as you are like because everybody around you was kind of like the same [. . .] you like bond with them [. . .] I don't know. It taught me a lot of stuff, yeah it taught me a lot about life it taught me things that I shouldn't do and what I should do and I just felt like I learned more because of where I came from and I wouldn't want to be from anywhere else other than where I grew up at because it is what it is. - Angie

Resistant capital, for the participants in this study, was most often demonstrated through challenging inequity and subordination and articulating a vision for rethinking misconceptions. Such capital indicates the presence of critical thinking, demonstrating that despite their status as “dropouts” they are not passive, but rather actively engaged in resisting negative stereotypes of themselves and their communities.

Linguistic capital includes the ability to communicate in various languages or styles. In this work, we provide examples of how language builds linguistic capital and we extend linguistic capital to include the medium of art as a form of linguistic capital.

Six young adult participants had a language other than English spoken in their homes including Spanish, Laotian, and American Sign Language (ASL). Rather than only considering these families as deficient and linguistically isolated among mostly monolingual English speaking communities, the concept of linguistic capital pushes us to think critically about the work these young adults engage in as linguistic and cultural brokers. That is, they serve as intermediaries between people who might otherwise not be able to communicate as effectively because of language and/or culture. These bilingual and bicultural young adults contribute to their families' well-being, acquiring skills through interpreting that are often overlooked. For example, Angelica's *testimonio* counterstory shares some her experiences interpreting for her parents in schools and places of employment. She assumed this role in her family at an early age and spoke of the nuances involved in interpreting from English to ASL stating, "... if I were to talk to you, just how I am now and translate it to my parents, they wouldn't understand it. I [would] have to sign it in a way [they could] comprehend and it's hard." In fact, it is common for ASL interpreters to work in teams of two to monitor accuracy during conversations as well as to provide breaks for the interpreter (Atkinson, personal communication, January 27, 2010). Angelica's work as her family's primary interpreter has taught her remarkable skills. According to researcher Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (2003), children who translate acquire skills including, metalinguistic awareness, civic and familial responsibility, social maturity and cross-cultural awareness.

Linguistic capital also helps us think about the multiple ways young adults communicate that are often overlooked in schools and society, including visual art, writing, and music. Many of the young adults shared their creative pursuits. Aurora, for example, spoke at length about her art and sketched throughout her interviews, creating images that words alone could not capture. Figure 1 depicts Aurora's artistic rendition of her home – an apartment she shares with her partner and her partner's father.

As Aurora sketched, she spoke of her challenges with social anxiety that often kept her indoors. Her partner also feared for Aurora when she left the apartment because of Aurora's addiction to heroin – a daily struggle Aurora spoke of candidly. Their home became both a place to retreat and at times, a place she longed to escape. During her last interview, Aurora brought sketchbooks and journals of her artwork and explained that they served as a place to keep her secrets and "document [her] life." Aurora was intimately connected with her artistic and writing processes, noting that while it helped her make sense of certain things, it was not helpful when she was angry because she became too critical of herself. Both art and writing are forms of linguistic capital for Aurora because they provide an outlet to communicate hopes and feelings, particularly for a young woman struggling with social anxiety.



Figure 1. "Sometimes it's like a prison but sometimes it's like a sanctuary." - Aurora

All of the young adults interviewed demonstrated navigational capital - the various strategies used in navigating social institutions. In this section we present three examples of young adults navigating on behalf of others and movement through various schools in the Capital Region.

There were many examples of young adults using community cultural wealth strategies to navigate social institutions on behalf of others. For example, Angelica's work as an ASL interpreter for her family not only demonstrates linguistic capital but also navigational capital in that her work helps friends and family map social institutions that she is a bit more familiar with. In the following example, Joaquin serves as a guide for his younger brother's schooling.

Joaquin's younger brother has a speech impediment that makes it difficult for people to understand him. Joaquin's father travels for his job as a migrant worker and while his mother was present for as many of the school conferences as she could attend, her job would not allow her to answer her cell phone during work hours, limiting her ability to communicate with school in a timely and effective manner. As we prepared for our first interview, Joaquin shared that his mother asked for his help with his brother and shared how he became an active advocate for his brother in school speaking with teachers, principals and district administrators.

Teachers are basically telling him, "Here's a book, read it." [H]e's not going to learn [anything] from it. . . . [I]f I show him how to do this, he'll pick it up immediately but if I tell him, "Hey, this is how you do it. This is how it is. Go on," he will be like, "Alright whatever." He won't do it, he won't even try. . . every time they have had PTA meetings, you know parent meetings and then his speech class. . . every time I go in. . . I have to convince them he's not retarded and they think he is and it's like, "Are you guys serious? We've gone through this already," and I have to convince them. . . [his teachers] put him in a mentally challenged class. . . and I'm like, "No, my brother is not going to be in there." There's nothing wrong with that, you know, there's nothing bad. Kids have a disability so they've got to be in there, that's fine. But if they don't have it, just because he needs a little bit more attention from a teacher, . . . "I told them, just because you guys don't want to give him the attention, you're going to send him there. . . just to get him out of your way." That's how I see it with him, you know. They don't want to give him the time of day so they'll just send him into an easier class, back to what they think he is.

Joaquin quickly learned about the importance and effectiveness of his presence in his brother's school. His frustration that school officials interpreted his brother's speech impediment as a mental disability and subsequent placement into special education pushed Joaquin to become more involved (also another example of resistant capital). Through regular meetings with school and district officials, Joaquin successfully negotiated to have his brother taken out of the special education class and receive a more general education. Joaquin's role as an advocate did not stop at the school gates but continued at home despite his own work to complete his GED while living in Sacramento, an hour from Yuba County where his brother lives.

I try and help him as much as I can in school. With homework I kind of left him alone already

because I see he's doing better and the better he's doing, the less I try to help him . . . I'm not always going to be there. . . . [W]hen I was going to Sacramento . . . as far as like, keeping track of him . . . I would make him give me almost weekly reports. I called at school randomly, "Hey, how's my brother doing? Is anything you guys need?" Or they call me, "Hey your brother's acting up, you need to talk to him." I get him on the phone, "Hey you need to behave and then I would just have a talk with him like a little man to man talk on the phone with him and he'd be better."

Joaquin's brother may not have been as successful without Joaquin's involvement, given that the schools' schedule coincided with their parents' work schedules, and his mother was unable to find a way to work around that barrier. Joaquin's familiarity with the school system and ability to attend meetings during school hours challenged how school officials approached educating his brother. Joaquin's navigational capital enabled him to be advocate for his brother even when not living in the same city.

A striking commonality among the 16 participants was their movement throughout and outside of the Capital Region and more specifically, their movement through different schools. Participants attended an average of eight schools from kindergarten to high school. The lowest number of schools listed was four and the most was 15 - these are low estimates as a total of six young adults had a difficult time recalling all of schools they attended and left out the names of schools they did not remember. Students moved to different schools for a variety of reasons: one was a child of migrant farm-workers, three were in foster care, and many were periodically homeless and/or not living with their parents. This movement often placed them at a disadvantage for various reasons including peer relationships, needing to learn new systems and curriculum (the material had already been covered and they were bored or were advanced and they missed important information) and credit transfer (see Audrey). This movement throughout different schools is a good example demonstrating how possessing navigational capital may not result in the ability to adapt and adjust enough to perform well in school. Instead, we suggest these young adults possess navigational capital because of the perseverance required to maneuver new schooling environments from kindergarten through high school. When Joaquin was asked if he dropped out of school or was pushed out, he stated "No, I didn't drop out of school, I still continued all the way, I tried until my senior year." The concept of navigational capital begs an inquiry into what it must have taken for these young adults to stay in school until high school despite constant movement. The subsequent examples provide some insight on the strategies employed to persist.

In this study, social capital emerged similarly to Yosso's (2005) description of social capital as human and community resource networks. In this section, we focus on the social capital developed and cultivated among adult allies.

The young adults interviewed spoke highly of the few adults they felt close to. Most of these adults were employed by social services, some worked at schools, and others were family or community members who dedicated time to provide individualized support to the young adults they served. Throughout most of our work, we call these "adult allies" because they are in meaningful, authentic relationships with youth who have left or considered leaving school without graduating. These allies provided critical assistance and advocated on behalf of young adults. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's (in press) concept of "empowerment agent" may help further explain how some young adults were served through this type of relationship. Empowerment agents provide not only institutional resources but also "a commitment to empower youth with a critical consciousness and with the means to transform themselves, their communities, and society as a whole" (p3). For example, Sema'j's relationship with his stepfather was one of guidance and mutual respect. More than advice, he felt his stepdad lead by example what it meant to live a good life. In turn, Sema'j began to live his life with the idea that the way he lived *his* life, could also be an example for others.

Before, I just didn't care. I was real selfish but now that I'm going to church and I'm doing good, it makes my mom feel better and it makes my sister feel better. Your life is like bigger than us, period. I feel like our life influences a lot of people in the world.

For Sema'j, as for many other young adults, social capital resources did not necessarily provide material resources but rather caring guidance and life lessons for himself and his role as a contributor to society at large.

Yet material resources were also instrumental for day-to-day living and for improving social mobility. For example, while waiting for a participant to arrive, the interviewer noticed a young man trying on dress shoes in front of one of the adult allies' desks. Upon asking about this exchange, another adult ally replied,

... frequently we have to [do] "creative" things to get our students what they need. We buy things with our own money when they are on sale or keep stashes of whatever under our desks (we can hardly scoot in [our desk chairs] for the hygiene kits and duffle bags). Whenever we are out we pick up job listings and meet management staff. Case management is more than 40 hrs a week. Really, you have to be on constant lookout for things the students might need. It's about anticipation.

This suggests that social capital is as much about finding it as it is about cultivating it in a way that considers the needs of individuals. Above all, the adults they trusted most were ones who they felt genuinely cared about them and supported them unconditionally. In fact, some young adults shared examples of distancing themselves from adults who could provide institutional support but were not caring individuals. Aurora explained how she saw clear differences in the way adults interacted with

her, influencing how she, in turn, communicated (or not) with them.

I could talk to [adult ally] about anything and she always has something good to say. Instead of condemning me for slipping up, she's like, "Call me and I'll help you." [...] she doesn't make me feel like shit when I slip up . . . because she cares about me and I know it and then I feel bad for it, you know what I mean? She doesn't make me like, I hate myself or whatever like this one lady she works in this program [...] she would just condemn me for slipping up [...] and she was like a substance counselor and she's supposed to be sensitive towards that. Like, she went through it herself and she was just an asshole to me. [...] She was all like, "What's wrong with your face?" Like, what is that? Are you going to say that to someone with emotional issues? You know what I mean? That's unacceptable so it's people like that that shouldn't be working in social services because if you're going to like make fun of somebody or make them feel bad about their physical appearance which is something you can't help and then accuse them of being on drugs when I was completely sober. Like what the hell is that?

Interactions like Aurora and Sema's are good reminders of how youth and young adults (as are most people) are sensitive to how they are treated. While resource networks may exist, the quality of their engagement with those they're intended to serve will influence their efficacy and utility.



Youth Voices for Change

When asked about what they liked about schools, caring teachers or school staff were framed as the most significant resource from their vantage point. For Edward, it was a teacher who gave him a second chance and allowed him to complete work he had missed despite Edward's disrespectful attitude towards him. When Joaquin became involved in a gang, teachers who were described as authentic and honest told him he was smart but was not going anywhere. In contrast, when Graciela arrived at the front office of a new high school in the third trimester of her pregnancy, she vividly described the cold response she received from a staff member that she didn't belong in that school. As we consider this finding, it is interesting to note that more often than not, the knowledge, social/professional networks, material resources, and enrichment opportunities, supposedly

offered by schools are rarely identified as meaningful by the participants, raising important questions about why this is the case. Were youth not positioned to take advantage of them? Were they not offered? Were they not encouraged?

Familial capital consists of cultural, family, and community knowledges and history. This form of capital is focused on commitment to community well-being that can manifest as caring and nurturing. We previously discussed other situations that include examples of familial capital such as Angelica serving as her family's interpreter and Joaquin's work to ensure his brother was not tracked into special education. In this section, we extend familial capital to how it plays out in the community.

In looking for examples of commitment to community well-being, we found that the young adults in this study engaged in the civic life of their communities everyday. Indeed, all 16 young adults shared examples of goodwill and caring or nurturing towards others and actions taken to promote the well being of the community at large. Everyday examples include walking a friend home late at night when the bus stops running, advocating to teachers and administrators for a sibling who is tracked into special education, interpreting for teachers, administrators and community members, and opening their homes to friends who faced challenges. These participants did not discuss this everyday engagement as purposeful volunteerism, but rather something they felt compelled to do. We call this *everyday civic engagement* because they draw upon accessible resources to meet critical individual and community needs. It is important to note, however that this "every day-ness" is not reflective of triviality. In fact, in some cases, their contributions are about enabling survival and persistence.

While all of the participants were socioeconomically poor and spoke of the economic poverty in their neighborhoods, many were considerate and empathetic towards those who had less than them. Graciela, for example, saves bottles and cans for two homeless people in her community.

He always comes to my door and goes "Good morning, ma'am. Do you have anything for me today?" I'm like, "Yup, I do." So he knows when to come and stuff and it makes me feel good because you know I am helping somebody out, you know hopefully somebody could help me out, cash me out and hopefully I can move but in the meantime that's all I could do. So another lady you know started noticing and she goes you got anything for me? So I am like "not today" so what I do now is like take turns for both of them, I mean that's the only thing we can do...

In return, one of the homeless people she helps began to pick up leaves from her front yard and she insisted that he not, telling him, "No, I do this because I want to do it. You don't have to do no work for me." She explained, "He's an old guy, he's very old and like when his knee gives up, he's in his wheelchair pushing the cart and it's like, 'No.'"

Graciela also shared much frustration with and avoidance of her neighbors who "don't work, play video games all the time," and were often into or evading trouble with the law. One day they had asked to drink from her outside water hose because they hadn't paid their water bill. She said yes and later that day, purchased drinking water for them.

That's how I am. I'm aggressive and defensive when it comes to my family but also I can't see people suffer, I don't know why. I just can't see people suffer like that.

Like many of the participants interviewed, despite her own limited income, Graciela found ways to help those in need. While everyday civic engagement could be solely considered a form of familial capital because the dedication to help others in need is informed by a spirit of communal goodwill, our findings suggest that this may be a new form of community cultural wealth – civic capital (Burciaga, forthcoming). The generosity demonstrated towards others is often overshadowed by stereotypes of who we think these young adults are and what they are capable of. Indeed, the concept of familial capital suggests that commitment to communities comes in various forms and styles.

Aspirational capital includes the ability to aspire and dream despite challenges. One of the most prominent forms of capital in this study was the existence of aspirational capital for themselves, their families, and the communities they lived in. We begin with a discussion of aspirations for families and explore aspirations to learn.

All young adults interviewed had high aspirations for their families, as evidenced in some of the examples from Angelica and Joaquin's *testimonios*. The participants who had children spoke extensively about their aspirations for their own children. Despite their own challenges in education, all of them aspired to provide their children with better schooling. This assertion was always followed up with their plans to move out of the counties they lived in to give their children this opportunity. With limited resources themselves, these parents invested tremendous time and energy into caring for and teaching their children. For example, Edward and his girlfriend received welfare and had very little money left for themselves after paying rent, utilities, food, and diapers for their son. Both smokers, they smoked outside of the apartment because they felt the apartment was their son's apartment and wanted him to be healthy. In another example, Audrey taught her 2-year old daughter numbers and colors:

[she knows] her numbers, you say over and she'll repeat it. She can go all the way up to like 14. She can do her whole alphabet, her first, middle, last name, colors, animals, shapes, objects outside, all of that.

In fact, Audrey shared after one interview that she was not so sure her daughter would learn much from Head Start preschool because she was already familiar with their curriculum. All the participants had high aspirations for learning when it came to their siblings and children, and learning was equally important to the young adults interviewed.

One stereotype that young adults who leave school early wrestle with is the notion that they do not care about their education. What we found, however, was that they felt their schooling stood in the way of their aspiration to learn.

Interviewer: If you could learn more about one thing, what would it be?

Angie: I would say [...] math [...] because math is really hard for me, so I really wanna learn like hecka' math skills and tricks to get around it because it's always been real hard for me, math was not my favorite subject.

Interviewer: Have you had a class that you liked or a teacher you liked that showed you how to do math well?

Angie: Not that I could... no.

Angie's desire to learn math is one of many examples documented in this study demonstrating that students who give up on schooling still maintain a clear aspiration to learn. All 16 of the participants in this study shared that they aspire to learn more than they had been taught in schools. In addition to math, subject-specific interests included psychology, world politics, personal finance, parenting, and a desire to know more about their own history and culture. A common critique among

participants was that they did not have opportunities to connect what they learned in school with their own lives and future plans.

Young adults were certain most of their aspirations are within reach. Despite saying that motherhood prompted Graciela to scale back her initial aspiration to become a judge, she continues her studies to complete her GED while planning her route to the local community college to become certified in court reporting. In another example, Steven's experiences with homophobia, civic engagement with PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and other political movements throughout the Capital Region have inspired a career in politics. While enrolled in community college and taking transferable courses, Steven has begun researching law schools to find a fit for his interests.

Others were unsure about their ability to achieve their visions, highlighting challenging and intersecting personal and systemic barriers (see also Rios, Campbell & Romero, 2010; London & Erbstein et al., 2010). For example, Aurora speaks of her aspiration to have children but is uncertain about her challenges with heroin addiction. In another example, despite Victor's rich social network and optimism about his future as an artist, he shares his uncertainty about his future in the United States as undocumented immigrant. While Audrey dreams for her daughter and takes steps to ensure they will be realized, in the context of mental health, work, transportation, and childcare challenges, she finds it difficult to dream for herself.



Youth Voices for Change

In summary, the 16 young adults interviewed provided insight on the multitude of challenges they have faced in the past, are facing in the present and anticipate facing in the future. Although the sample size is small, their stories echo those shared by adult allies from throughout the region and clear trends in HYHR quantitative and youth-generated data with respect to low levels of education, health, civic engagement, and labor market attachment, suggesting the urgency of addressing these challenges on a regional scale.

The young adults interviewed demonstrated community cultural wealth values and resources they drew upon in the four areas discussed. Such values and resources complicate predominant views of “dropouts” as disconnected and apathetic. Instead, these findings of community cultural wealth position these young adults as contributing members of society who have not had equal access to opportunities (see also Owens et al., 2010; and London & Erbstein, et al., 2010).

We advocate for a reinvestment of our resources to support the various forms of capital they have managed to create and maintain despite the challenges and disappointments they have faced. While community cultural wealth alone cannot guard against all systemic or personal barriers, various forms of capital used to navigate these challenges are important to everyday persistence and are too often overlooked. As young adults who have navigated, are addressing, and anticipate facing more challenges, they hold critical insight into how to approach change—wisdom well beyond what could be compiled in this overview. To this end, it is critical for adult decision-makers, adults who work with children and youth anywhere, to listen to these young adults in their own voices. Following are three samples of their *testimonio* counter-stories.

Authors' Note:

We would like to thank Larisa Jacobson for her work helping to collect and analyze *testimonio* interviews and Teri Greenfield for her work preparing the images used in this paper.

References

- Benmayor, R. (1988). For every story there is another story which stands before it. *Oral History Review*, 16(2), 1-13.
- Breslau, J., Rodriguez, G.M., Erbstein, N. Burciaga, R. & Hartzog, C. (2010). *Educating for Equity: An Analysis of the Capital Region Educational Pipeline*. Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions Working Paper, Center for Regional Change, UC Davis.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). "Developmental Research, Public Policy, and the Ecology of Childhood." *Child Development*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Mar., 1974), pp. 1-5
- Burciaga, R. (2007). *Chicana Ph.D. students living nepantla: Educación and aspirations beyond the doctorate*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Cooper, C. R. (in preparation). Bridging multiple worlds: Cultures, youth identities, and pathways to college. New York: Oxford University Press
- Burciaga, R., Delgado Bernal, D., Cruz, C., & Perez Huber, L. (2008). " *Testimoniadoras en academia*: epistemological and methodological considerations of *testimonio* in the academy." Symposium conducted at the meeting of the *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*. Salt Lake City, UT.
- Faulstich Orellana, M. (2003). In other words: en otras palabras: learning from bilingual kids' translating/interpreting experiences (Evanston, IL, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University).
- London, J.K. & Erbstein, N., with Benner, C., Rios, M. & Romero, M.S. (2010). "Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions: Informing Action for the 9-County Capital Region" Drawing on contributions from the Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions research team (see paper for full listing). Study commissioned by Sierra Health Foundation with additional funding from The California Endowment. Center for Regional Change, UC Davis.
- Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.
- Institute for the Study of Social Change. (2009, July). Hegemony, Ideology, and Oppositional Consciousness: Undocumented Youth and the Personal-Political Struggle for Educational Justice (Paper ISSC_WC_36). Berkeley, CA: Genevieve Negron-Gonzales.
- Owens, P.E., Nelson, A.A., Perry, A. & Montgomery-Block, K.F. (2010). *Youth Voice Matters: Toward Healthy Youth Environments*. Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions Working Paper, Center for Regional Change, UC Davis.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (in press). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents & their role in the empowerment of low-status students & youth. *Youth & Society*.

The Latina Feminist Group. (2001). *Telling to live: Latina feminist testimonios*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.

I like a lot of lyrical stuff, I used to like a lot of dumbed down stuff that was really blunt but I really found out that there was not really meaning to it. I like to listen to music that I actually get something out of. A lot of people call me deep because I want something more out of life than what I used to. I like to read. I like poetry. I read the bible a lot. I'm so happy they put a library right by my house. I'm so juiced because there's so many books I wanna read and it's true don't judge a book by its cover because you never know, I got some ugly books at home but they're really good.

I thought I was coming here to give a talk to high school students. Though maybe my story – my testimony – could be like talking to others – maybe high school students, people who give money to places like the boys and girls club, we don't have one here. I want to tell my story because I feel like when somebody goes through something, it is not about them because when they get out of it, they're going to tell someone else what to do, what not to - to prevent it from even happening. Like if I go through this, it's not about me, it's about helping someone else. I was telling my mom about coming to talk about my story and she wondered if I was going to tell them everything, even the bad stuff. I said, yeah, I'm going to tell them everything.

Like when I was little, I remember my dad was around but they fought a lot – I remember my mom stabbing knives on the side of the wall so he couldn't get in even if he did unlock the door I remember calling the police and they knew exactly where we were like "oh yeah, your mom and dad are at it again". My dad was around when I was young but he used to mess with mom – he mentally abused her. When he left, I helped out more - I used to travel over the catwalk to get eggs or juice or just mow the lawn - I liked seeing everybody happy. I feel like my mom always provided . . . there were times we didn't have food but she tried.

We moved around a lot. My mom worked at the air-force base near Sacramento – my grandpa was in the army but I didn't really know him - and then she had another job and now works for the State. From the time I started kindergarten to now, I went to 11 different schools. I'm thinking mostly White. I don't even remember seeing Asian. There was a couple of Mexicans. I just remember white and some Mexicans and 6 black people literally. From Kindergarten through 6th grade, it was six black people in our school, and I was one of them. In one school, they used to call me *kaydoo*, that means nigger in Mongolian or Hmong or whatever. I just wanted to fit in so I used to be hecka' goofy and make people laugh and then I got in trouble a lot. Twenty minutes at recess and then I'd get busted again when I got home. Some teachers said they were going to put me into special ed. but – I was like "what?" I was outspoken and would always ask questions but then never got put into special ed. I didn't think I belonged in special ed but didn't see the real reason for school. I just thought I had to do good grades just to keep my mom happy. But I felt like I never could do it. I don't understand why like no one ever told me why I've got to get good grades or what it was going to lead to. No one ever just sat me down, they just wanted me to get them. I started getting into fights at school and getting into more trouble even though I knew I shouldn't and my mom taught me how to be respectful – it was like I know I shouldn't get mad at the teacher, but sometimes I did – it was like I was on autopilot. Junior high is when I started to hang out more with girls – we'd invite them over to our house when my mom wasn't home until my sister told on us. Then I went back to another school where I felt like I was in elementary school all over again – I was the only black dude. They were all pretty wealthy.

Some people don't understand that you can live in Elk Grove and still be struggling. We were barely making it . . . middle class . . . no, we were low class. People thought that because I went to that school, I lived in that area that was good. It was Section 8 – like we had no food in our fridge. But my mom wanted me to do good in school. My sister would buy me video games if I did good in school. In high school, I started basketball and they started talking to me about why I needed to have good grades. But I started hanging out and being a follower – trying to fit in – so I started skipping school all the time, drinking, smoking. I met my girlfriend and spent all my time with her. Everybody wanted me because I was athletic and they just said I needed to concentrate and get my grades right and I'd make it but I didn't listen. That's when I stopped wanting to play basketball – I had no direction. The coach and my teammates said stuff but no one else noticed I was skipping school. My dad came back into the picture during this time and my sister thought my mom was choosing him over her. There was a lot going on at home. How did I keep up with school with everything else going on? I didn't, I was letting my circumstances get the best of me. I started to talk back to my Mom – I ran away a lot, I got in a lot of arguments with my mom because of grades and because I just didn't want to listen because I thought I knew what I was doing. My junior year I went crazy. I started independent study at Elk Grove Charter because my girlfriend went there and I wanted to be with her all the time. They were mostly white - there were like a couple of black people because it was like an independent school but it was also a private school at the same time. So I went there and then I had free time so there was more free time to mess up. I just had hecka' free time so I was smoking and drinking, doing all types of crazy stuff. Just fighting. That's when I started gang banging too - we started messing with Oak Park - there's a thing called guns up – we started doing some crazy stuff. But I felt like I had to do it. Like I used to just start banging it hard because they were there, and I grew up with them so I've got to go with them. So like I grew up with these people so they knew what I liked and this is where we're from. It was like that really. Gangs are not about money though , it's just about respect. But I moved to two other schools, once to escape from them calling CPS on my mom because I didn't have my glasses or contacts at the time. I was still drinking and getting more into drugs and then finally Charter school told me I couldn't graduate even if I passed my classes. I didn't understand how many credits you needed to have, I didn't understand none of that.

I'm in a better place now I started going to church in junior high but have been going more and I've got God in my life now. I remember praying for friends and basically God let everybody leave that's holding me back from human success. I prayed for that and when that started to happen I forgot what I prayed about and I was like "what's going on?" because he does answer prayers. And then my Mom found this place for me this adult school – it was a summer program and I got paid for doing work and I could also get my diploma faster – this is the first time I started taking school seriously.

"How would others describe me?" she asked. People say I'm real, always say I am a deep person. I always hear I am a deep person and they like the way I put words in together and I'm motivational, I should be a motivational speaker or my words of wisdom are inspiring or read my poetry. There's a few things I think could help – like have stuff for teenagers to have fun without being strict – like they have centers but they don't treat African- Americans or people with that "urban look" all that well, I want places that really want to *give* to the kids so they won't be back in the streets. I know they got boys and girls clubs but not where I'm at – maybe Pop Warner – a community – free concerts. I just want people to stay away from the streets more. When I get older, I'm going to have some type of organization where I'm going to bring the skate rink back, bowling, I'm just going to have a whole place full that teenagers can go where they feel like they can get away and it's not going to be

expensive at all. Some place where they can just go for everything. A barber shop, everything.

If I could say anything to Obama? Probably when I go to college and get my knowledge on, if you ask me that question in like a year, I'd probably have a whole lot to ask him but for now I don't. I could tell him about the area and thank you for the library and talk to our governor Schwarzenegger because he tripping.

If I could learn more about one thing, it would be about herbology. I have an old Indian herbology book from way back when – it's Native American. I found it at the library. I saw it and was like, "I like this." It just interests me. I picked up a book and I flipped through it and I was reading about the medical use of herbs and I was saying oh this is interesting because I really don't like taking prescriptions so I'd rather take, I'd rather research like medical use, like cloves can help kids with teething and things like that. Well, the natural teething tablets quit working and I wasn't really fond of giving her little bit of Jack Daniels on the gums. That was only when everything else would work and that's only like a little the finger and just . . . but I don't like giving her alcohol so I bought a little shot glass and I've used that like maybe four times and it's almost all still full. I tried the cloves once, I tried the warm milk with some honey to help her with her sleeping at times and then cloves seem to help for a while.

For daycare, my daughter stays with my grandpa and his caregiver. He has a heart condition – he's had a triple bypass, heart attacks, strokes, hereditary tumors in the brain and needs a caregiver 24/7, he's on oxygen 24/7 pretty much. He and his caregiver live almost 5 miles from my house, either I take a bus and drop my daughter off or her dad takes the bus and drops her off or they come and pick her up. I leave my house at 10:00 to be here by noon. I had to drop her off today so once I left the house it took me about two hours to get here. I give his caregiver between 5 and 10 dollars a day to watch her. I don't live close to friends, some live in Sacramento, some of them live by Rocklin but I don't really talk to them because I'm too busy. I'm either working trying to get into school and taking care of my daughter too. I don't really talk to them very much.

My daughter and I are on welfare so I'm supposed to go to school for four hours and go to work for four hours. I really don't have very much free time. My daughter, my friends and family die or something comes up. Like last year, my mom's fiancé died, he refused to go to the doctor and get his heart checked out. My friend, Nicky died because of her heart. Another friend, one of the old foster kids died the other year from drowning in the water. My boyfriend's grandma died last year. A good friend of mine, her boyfriend. Can't remember who else died last year after that and then this year it was my grandma. She died from stomach cancer and cervical cancer within six months it ate all her stomach, large intestine I think and small intestine in six months. And then my friend, she's had heart problems and weight problems and she caught a pneumonia that killed about 100 people and she caught it and came back and . . . then she got into a deep coma, depression so she died from that.

It ain't possible to tell you my whole life story, my therapist has heard part of it and he says it sounds like a horror film. What's happened is that my mom married my step dad when I was a baby. My sister is seven years younger than me and then I have a brother who is ten years old and another brother who is 5. My stepfather beat and abused us a lot, he beat and abused my mom, tried killing my mom. Slammed my brother's head into a wall and he was only like two -he's ten now. He did a bunch of drugs. Always getting into trouble and fighting. Then eventually after he tried killing her and he slammed my brother's head into a wall that was like the end of it. He just took off completely with my aunt. We used to stay in Desert Hot Springs for a while because my grandma lived down there. When I was younger I used to help her with her daycare. Eventually, I moved down there a few years ago and spent like six months living with her. It had been a while and we had completely lost contact

with her and then one day just out of the blue I think she got a hold of me and we moved down there for a while.

We moved back with my mom to Yuba and she started dating more guys and I only really liked the one or two of all the guys she dated, I didn't like any of them pretty much. They were druggies, violent, abusive, I didn't like it. Then if I approved of the guy, she wouldn't date him. She did date the guys that I didn't approve of that were druggies. They didn't really abuse me so much as my brother and sister, I mean there was a few incidents where my head got slammed into a cabinet but my sister got thrown onto a bunk bed with a bar in her back. My Mom locked my sister in the room with a dead bolt lock, things like that. When I was in the fourth grade I went to school and I couldn't stand. I couldn't sit, he had beat me so bad. The school called CPS because I had bruises everywhere and CPS came and interviewed me and I told them what happened. My step dad took me out of school early that day, he didn't realize I talked to CPS and they left a note on the door and they called CPS back and they said oh she beat herself that bad, she wants attention and that was the end of the CPS. I was locked in my bedroom all summer. The only time I managed to get out was like three or four times a day to go to the bathroom and take a bath and that was it. I just sat on my bed and read books. Thought about climbing out of the window but we were in an upstairs apartment and there was rocks on the bottom so that wouldn't have worked out too well. My friend's knew, that was about it - they noticed. I had one friend that came up one time to ask if I can play and my step dad was yelling at me and my mom opened the door and he made me clean the whole bathroom with a toothbrush because we lived in the same apartment she could hear all the yelling and what was going on. At that time we were only in like the second grade when it first started. But I I wasn't sexually abused. Beaten, yeah. Ignored, yeah. I took care of my siblings a lot - my mom would come home from work and just either pass out and lock herself in the room to do drugs or she wouldn't be home. She would always take my sister with her and leave my brother with me. She told everyone that my brother was actually my son. They should've pulled me out on the fourth-grade but they didn't. By the time CPS found us, I was too old. I knew by that time I was too old to be adopted. My two brothers are adopted or else I would go for custody of them.

I don't remember all of my schools. If I had to count . . . maybe 16 that I remember. We moved around a lot through a few counties - Yuba, Sacramento, Sutter, Placer - the places I remember. We were running a lot from the cops because of charges of spousal abuse, child abuse, and violation of probation. But what I remember is that when I was going to school I did bring books home and read and clean the house and just stay with my mom and everybody. But I don't know, no matter what I did, I got into trouble for everybody else. The boy next to me can be talking and I'd get into trouble for it even though if he wasn't talking to me. Maybe it's because I get easily distracted, I don't know. The student disability center at the college isn't sure if I have ADD or ADHD right now. In school, I wasn't really good with my work. Somebody would say something or noise and I'd turn around and I'd completely forget about my work. I'd get very easily distracted. Homework, when I was younger and with my mom, it was hard. She doesn't comprehend math, I don't comprehend math. And with me cleaning the house and taking care of my brother everything it was a little difficult. If my grandma was there she'd watched him and I'd have to go do my homework but my grandma doesn't really know how to spell very well or didn't know how to spell very well and it was hard for me on the spelling of some words. Essays were hard for me to write, things like that.

Me and my boyfriend we are arguing and I walked away again and we went in the closet because I

don't like to fight in front of my daughter I tend to drop it and I walked and everybody knows you don't pick me up, I freak out, I cannot be picked up, and he went to pick me up and I told him, "No, put me down" and next thing I know my shoulder blade hit a shelf and I dropped down to the ground. I dislocated it. He claims it was an accident. I had a hairline fracture on my elbow from walking away from a fight a few months prior and he keeps claiming that he didn't see my arm, although these were accidents and he didn't mean it. I'm not so much sure about trust, he cheated for over six months in a row. I probably won't stay with him there have been some other issues and I'm not afraid of him coming after me. That would be a very stupid mistake on his behalf because I know how to take care of myself; I have done security jobs for concerts. Wouldn't be very smart for him to come after me and he knows that.

If I could do anything I would like to stay at home. My 2-year-old daughter knows her numbers, you say over and she'll repeat it. She can go all the way up to like 14. She can do her whole alphabet, her first, middle, last name, colors, animals, shapes, and objects outside, all of that. My goals for my future? I just want to get through high school. I don't really dream, I just plan. I know some stuff is not possible so I don't even think about it. And I know getting my high school diploma is possible so I'm gonna go for it.

I am fluent in sign language. I started learning the TTY [teletypewriter] when I was close to being six or seven and began interpreting for them when I was about 10. I'm 18 and I just moved to Sacramento seven years ago. I have six sisters and five brothers. I've moved five times and have been to seven schools. I was born in Martinez, lived in Concord for ten years, Oakland for two and now live in Sacramento and we have moved twice since I've been here. The area I live in is boring. It's empty. That's the only two words I'll ever think of, boring and empty . . . oh, and isolated. Like, there's nothing to do. It's miles and miles to walk around and I still don't see anything. There's McDonalds and a Sara Lee bakery outlet, which I love. All you can really do is go to the park where I like to go to just to sit down, chill out, mellow out, talk to friends mostly on the phone and just sit down and cry and talk to myself. It's summer and it's peaceful, I can just hear the birds chirping and I don't hear any yelling or anything like inside my house, it's just peaceful and quiet. There are a whole lot of kids but they choose not to come outside or their parents are not telling them anything. They just like to be in their house, that's just pretty much me too, I like to sit there and watch TV. This area isn't safe either. My little brother got hit last month, riding his bike to school. There was a newsletter in the school the week after that saying that a little girl almost got kidnapped on her way to school.

Growing up, nobody at school knew that my parents were deaf or knew that I was interpreting for them. They didn't really seem interested in it or they didn't even care about my parents being deaf or having any way of communicating with my parents. It's a very big struggle. Nobody really knows anything about what deaf people can or cannot do. Yes, my parents couldn't write or talk but people want somebody who can talk and that's me. I can talk. I can sign. I can interpret for my parents and they are like, "Oh, you have to be 18 years old." And I'm like, "Well excuse me!" I'm my Mom's oldest and my two older brothers from my Dad didn't really care that my parents were deaf, they didn't want to learn the language, they are still learning.

It's frustrating to my parents because some words, like if I were to talk to you, just how I am now and translate it to my parents, they wouldn't understand it. I would have to sign it in a way they could comprehend and it's hard. They would try to respond in writing or they'd tell me and hopefully that would get through to them or they would somehow set up a meeting, have an interpreter come in and talk to them. But I remember that some teachers didn't respond to my parents. They knew that my parents were deaf, they didn't care. They would still try to call them knowing that you gotta go through a TTY relay service and they wouldn't even provide interpreters or anything. In middle school the district was always telling my parents that my Mom had to pay for interpreters. I would always explain to them that my parents can't. "Here, you have to use this service to talk to them." They always say, "I want to talk to your parents directly." I was like, "The only way you can do that is if you bring an interpreter." And they were like, "Oh, well can your mom bring one?" I was like, "No. And even if we were to be able to bring one, they are too much money." It's not like the Bay Area here. Every year there is a deaf expo down in Pleasanton in the Bay Area, all the deaf people go over there, all the hearing people, hard of hearing and deaf people and they go there and shop for what deaf people need which is phones, alarm clock, baby monitors and stuff like that, stuff that you can't find out here but you can find in the deaf event. It is actually cheaper at a deaf event than buying it regularly, believe me it's like a \$15-20 difference and it is very expensive and we go there every year.

I want to help my parents because nobody else is going to. My two sisters are lazy as crazy and they seem not to care at all. And I need to help because my mother, my father, it's part of my life if I don't do this what's going to happen? My dad never went to school and my mom graduated from high school, but she was always in basic skills, just the plus, minus, subtracting, dividing, all that. It's not really deep into calculus and English 11, 12 something like that. It was just basic elementary type thing and it wasn't easy for my parents, and still isn't for my parents. Right now, rhyming and matching sounds, it's hard. You can't hear so how do you know if it matches or anything? So I always help my little brothers or sisters with their homework. It's a struggle because my youngest brother has ADHD so it's hard for him. My other brother has ADD like me, he doesn't pay attention to anything, all he wants to do is sit there and watch TV. Another one of my brothers is the smartest one. He'll come home and be like, "I want to do my homework."

My parents depend on me a lot and I often don't feel supported by them. Like, one example, because they're deaf, my Mom had an alarm that vibrates and flashes lights when the baby cries from a little monitor right there by the baby. My mom will sometimes ignore it now that I'm older. She will always make me wake up and I go get the baby and the baby will sleep with me. Because of things like that, my brothers and sisters love me to death, but I had to tell them that, "I'm not your mother I'm your *sister*. *That's* your mother." And they were like, "No. Mommy." Like, "No, I'm not your mom." It was just so cute and I'm like, "I'm not a mother, I'm not. I take care of you guys yeah and I love you to death, but I'm not your mom, I'm a teenager, I need my breaks." I mean, my dad has helped me a little bit but mostly I'm the one helping him due to the fact that he's deaf. He comes here maybe three times out of a whole month, he works in the Bay Area, I think either Oakland or San Francisco, one of the two. I go down there to help them and make sure everything is fine for him.

I think I was in third grade when one of my younger sisters started preschool or kindergarten. It was my lunch and they had recess and my sister forgot her lunch and I saw it and had taken hers to give it to her. We went to lunch separate times and I remember bringing her lunch because I was full with mine so I just packed it in hers and the teacher got mad at me because I wasn't supposed to talk to the kindergarteners. I was telling the teacher that my parents are deaf and they couldn't come over here and explain to them that my sister had left her lunch and that I was bringing it to her. So I got into trouble and I *still* couldn't get my sister her lunch. I was really mad. I was like, "My sister is gonna be starving because you won't take her lunch." The teacher was like, "I can't because I don't know what you did with it." I'm like, "I'm only 10, come on now, what can I do with her lunch?"

I went to school early because my birthday's in the fall. So it was hard for me at that moment too was because I didn't know how to talk or anything so they had to put me in school early. I've been in speech since pre-school all the way to 10th grade. It's because my parents are deaf, they couldn't speak to me at all. All I knew was sign language. For a moment they had interpreters come in and talk to me cuz I wouldn't talk. All I would do was sign. I'm used to the signing world not the talking world. It was frustrating. I was always asking my mom if there was a deaf school that is mixed so I could go and sign to them and talk to people I know. To people who know sign language, I'm over here talking but I was always the quietest one in school. I would never talk to anybody. I don't even like talking right now. I don't like to talk. I always like to use my hands. Going to school, I would just stay there, be quiet, do homework, do my work and go home and sign to my parents like, "Mom I did this, I did that." Anything I do with my hands, just sign.

I was with growing up mostly with adults most of my life so I was close with all my teachers, because I didn't socialize with anybody. So I just talked to my teachers and the counselors. I would walk to the office just to talk to the front people and entertain them and just ask them about their life and they'll ask me and be like, "What?" They always ask me, "Why are you always here everyday?" I was like, "I don't have any friends and I don't like to talk to little kids like me. I want to socialize with adults." They were like okay, "If you're gonna do this, you've got to do some work." I was like, "Okay." So growing up I was kind of like a TA for all the schools, really. During lunch I would go to the office, I would go to each teacher that was there to ask them if they needed any help. And then when I went to [Kennedy] high school and I was a TA for my class for like a whole year. But I always came in during lunch or after I had my lunch to go help my teachers and help them put grades into the computer and staple some stuff and make sure they're all neatly together.

It was hard for me to do homework at my house. I was taking care my brothers and sisters helping them with their homework, bottle-feeding one of them and feeding the other, cooking and then washing dishes after I cooked for them and late at night I got to take a shower do some homework and hopefully try to finish it, if not, turn as much as I can, and even then it's still a bad grade and my teacher gave me multiple opportunities to finish them and turn them into for a better grade. I didn't skip class just to skip class. I went to school, I just got brought out because my parents needed me to interpret for them.

I dropped out of high school, March 10 of 2009. I had to remember this date in order to enroll to this adult school and that was the worst day of my life. I had a doctor's appointment and I was on my way to come back to school to get my missing assignment and they told me that because I have so many absences without any notes that you have to either come back next year to graduate or you can drop out. And they were talking to my IEP teacher and my caseload manager and they said, "If she wants to, you can go ahead and dis-enroll her." My Mom just had to sign the paperwork and they my parents were not happy with me.

I started to apply for jobs but they won't take high school dropouts so I re-enrolled in the adult school here. My boyfriend and I just found out we are having a baby. I went in and gave him the test and I just sat down and cried. I was like, "Babe, what are we going to do?" And he is like, "We are just going to take care of it like we're supposed to and make sure that everything is ok. Hopefully everything will come out perfectly fine," and he hugged me. My boyfriend's sister just had a baby two months ago and she is helping me because I had helped her throughout her pregnancy too. I'm not sure how to take care of my diabetes while I'm pregnant. That is one thing I don't know what to do because I am not on Medi-Cal. My last doctor was not that far, it's about an hour walk. It's good exercise for me but I still gain weight period because I have food on me while I walk. So I keep my nutrients up for the baby, make sure everything is ok.

I want to take care of my baby, have a good house, good job and survive to see my baby have a kid and get married and graduate and take care of myself to live to be a 102 at least. I want to become a sign language interpreter. I've always wanted to be a sign language interpreter I'm not going to have a no high school diploma stop me from doing it and that's what made me decide to go back. I don't want to be another one in my family not to graduate. I have the every day skills, I just need to get my degree.