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Color of Justice: Raise Your Voice For Justice

Santa Clara County Superior Court hosted an interactive virtual discussion for youth on overcoming barriers and being part of our justice system

On Tuesday, July 27, 2021, the Santa Clara County Superior Court Community Outreach Committee partnered with the Silicon Valley Urban Debate League (SVUDL) to host the Superior Court's second Color of Justice program. The Color of Justice Program is designed to promote diversity in the legal profession and in the justice system as a whole, and to provide students, who may or may not have previously envisioned a career in law, a greater understanding of the many pathways and opportunities available to them within the legal field.

"Everyone who has dedicated their lives to the justice system, broadly defined to include judges, attorneys, social workers, probation officers, law enforcement, youth justice advocates and more, know that our community is better served when there is diversity and inclusion at every level. It broadens the perspective for those of us who work within the system and instills greater trust in the community in which we serve," said Hon. Julia Alloggiamento, Chair of the Court Community Outreach Committee. "We hope this program inspired youth who may not have seen themselves on this path to recognize their potential and walk away with some insight as well as practical advice on how to begin their journey."

Attendees included a wide range of students located throughout the Bay Area, from first-year high school students to graduate and law students. Co-hosts of the event, Hon. Charles E. Wilson II and Hon. Shelyna Brown began the event with anecdotes from their lives and their pathways to the Bench before moving the event into breakout rooms where the students engaged in discussions with panelists about their professional journeys in the legal field. Panelists included Judges, members of the Public Defenders and the District Attorney's Offices, the Probation Department, law enforcement, law students, and numerous organizations dedicated to promoting student education and diversity in the legal profession (see below).

Britney Huelbig, Deputy Manager of the Santa Clara County Superior Court remarked, "We are grateful to the individuals and organizations who dedicate their time and resources to inspire the next generation of students from all backgrounds to become leaders in the Judicial Branch. The commitment of our justice partners is truly what opens the door for all youth to consider the law, judgeships, and the overall facilitation of access to justice as career goals."

The Superior Court is grateful to all of our attendees, panelists, and organizations that helped to make this event happen. Special thanks to [Fresh Lifelines for Youth](#), [Lincoln Law School](#), [Pathways to Law](#), and the [Silicon Valley Urban Debate League \(SVUDL\)](#).

The Silicon Valley Urban Debate League (SVUDL) is a 501c3 nonprofit that serves San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. Its mission is to empower Silicon Valley students, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status, to reach their full potential to become professional and community leaders by teaching critical thinking and communication skills through speech and debate programming.

Judge Charles E. Wilson II

Judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court



Judge Charles E. Wilson II was appointed to the Santa Clara County Superior Court in 2014 by Governor Edmund “Jerry” G. Brown, Jr. Prior to his appointment, Judge Wilson served as a litigation associate with two law firms, and as a Deputy District Attorney with the County of Alameda.

Judge Wilson received his undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, his MBA from the University of San Francisco School of Management, and his JD from the University of San Francisco School of Law.

Judge Wilson was born and raised in East Palo Alto.

Judge Shelyna V. Brown

Judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court



The Honorable Shelyna V. Brown presides over various criminal matters at the Santa Clara County Superior Court. Growing up in a marginalized community, she saw first-hand the challenges and obstacles that those with similar backgrounds encountered in society. She came to the realization that in order to change the outcome, one had to have a place and a voice at the table.

Upon graduating from law school, Judge Brown served as a public defender fighting for all those who did not traditionally have a voice—the low income, the immigrant, those suffering from mental health challenges, anyone who did not have access to their constitutional right of appropriate representation.

Judge Brown has also served on several boards and has been recognized for her excellence in advocacy and praised for her contributions to the community. She was awarded numerous honors and accolades, including Excellence in Advocacy from the 100 Black Women of Silicon Valley, and the Ivy Rose Foundation named her the first recipient of the Distinguished Women of Silicon Valley Awards. Furthermore, Judge Brown was honored by the Silicon Valley NAACP with the Wester Sweet Award for Legal Activism. She is the most recent recipient of the Santa Clara Law School Social Justice and Human Rights Award, and she received a Congressional Commendation from Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren.

From nonprofits to universities to global corporations including Stanford University, the Parent Project, and Gilead Sciences., Judge Brown uses her uncommon perspective as a superior court judge, certified mediator, entrepreneur, and master coach to inspire and equip individuals to meet and rise above all of life’s challenges.

Judge Brown received her Bachelor of Arts from University of California, Davis and her juris doctorate from Santa Clara University, School of Law where she is a well-known figure and frequent speaker and guest lecturer.

Judge Roberta Hayashi

Judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court



Roberta S. Hayashi is a Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge, currently assigned to hear Civil Trials. She was appointed to the bench in December 2014. After her initial assignment in the Criminal Division -Misdemeanors, Judge Hayashi served as an all-purpose judge in the Family Law division for over four years.

Judge Hayashi is a third-generation Japanese-American, who was born and raised in Santa Clara County, where she practiced business litigation and employment law for over 32 years before her appointment to the bench. She was President of the Santa Clara County Bar Association in 1996, and the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley in 2002-03. She has been a lecturer at Santa Clara University Law School and Lincoln Law School. Judge Hayashi graduated from

Stanford University and obtained her law degree from U.C. Davis School of Law, where she was on the Moot Court Honors Board and Editor-in-Chief of the Law Review.

Judge Nahal Iravani-Sani

Judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court



Nahal Iravani-Sani is a Superior Court Judge in Santa Clara County, California.

She has dedicated her entire professional career to public service. She currently serves on the Superior Court's Community Outreach Committee, Equality and Social Justice Committee, and is the co-chair of the Judicial Mentorship / Recruitment Committee with the goal of increasing diversity and inclusion in the legal profession.

Prior to joining the bench, Judge Iravani-Sani was a Deputy District Attorney for 23 years, representing the People of the State of California through all phases of the criminal justice system, including Violent Felonies, Domestic Violence, Narcotics, Consumer Fraud, Environmental Crimes, and the Sexual Assault Unit.

Dedicated to education and mentorship, Judge Iravani-Sani instructs Trial Advocacy at Stanford Law School, instructed Trial Techniques at Santa Clara University School of Law, and coached the award winning Willow Glen High School Mock Trial Team. She enjoys serving as a mentor to the next generation of trial attorneys.

In 2017, California Governor Edmund G. Brown appointed Hon. Iravani-Sani as the first Iranian-American judge to serve on the Santa Clara County Superior Court. She is currently on the Appellate Division of the Superior Court.

Judge Iravani-Sani has been the recipient of the Unity Award by the San Francisco Minority Bar Coalition, the Distinguished Service Award by the Iranian American Bar Association, and the Judge's Night Diversity Award by the Santa Clara County Bar Association for her commitment and leadership in promoting diversity in the legal profession. In 2021, she was the recipient of the Santa Clara University School of Law Social Justice and Human Rights Award for her passion and dedication to social justice issues.

Judge Lê Jacqueline Dương

Judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court



Judge Lê Jacqueline Dương is the first Vietnamese American woman appointed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to the bench in northern California in 2007. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, she fled by boat with her family as refugees to the United States where they first resettled in Butler, Pennsylvania. In 1980, in search of better economic opportunities, her father decided to relocate her entire family to San Jose, California. Raised by a single-parent in East San Jose, Judge Dương is a graduate of the California public school system. In 1991, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from San Jose State University with a degree in Political Science, then in

1994, obtained her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of California, Davis School of Law. She worked for the Santa Clara County Office of the Public Defender for more than three years, then joined the Santa Clara County Office of County Counsel for eight years before her judicial appointment in 2007.

Judge Dương currently serves as Supervising Judge of the South County Courthouse for Santa Clara Superior Court, Co-Chair of the Court's Equality and Social Justice Committee, Member of the Court's Executive Committee, and Co-Chair of the Court's Intern Committee. Judge Dương has a long history of service to the community. She is a founding member of three organizations that serve the community, including the Vietnamese American Bar association of Northern California (1998), the National Conference of Vietnamese American Attorneys (2006) and the Vietnamese American Professional Women of Silicon Valley (2006). All three organizations provide scholarship and mentorship programs for students. She also served in various capacity for the Judicial Council involving Ethics and Fairness Curriculum, Access and Fairness, and Cultural Competency.

Judge Jessica Delgado

Judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court



Judge Jessica Delgado was appointed to the Santa Clara County Superior Court by Governor Gavin Newsom in March of 2021. She graduated from University of California at Santa Cruz with a B.A. in Politics and earned her Juris Doctor from University of California at Berkeley. Prior to appointment, Delgado served the community as a public defender for more than twenty years.

A proud member of both the Latinx and LGBTQ+ communities, Delgado serves on the Santa Clara County Superior Court's Community Outreach, Language Access and Collaborative Court committees.

Judge Delgado is also a member of the California Judges Association LGBT Judicial Officers of California and the California Latino Judges Association.

Irene Williams

Deputy District Attorney, Santa Clara County



Deputy District Attorney Irene Williams is a proud native Texan. She was raised by a single mother in the housing projects in Houston, the 10th out of 13 children. Despite growing up in a crime-ridden area and experiencing difficult financial times throughout her childhood, Ms. Williams earned an academic scholarship to the University of Texas at Austin, where she received her bachelor’s degree. She received her law degree from the University of California, Davis School of Law, in 2014. Ms. Williams started her legal career as a prosecutor with the Sacramento County District Attorney’s Office. She began there as a bar-certified legal intern in 2013. She returned in 2014 as a post-bar legal research assistant and was hired full-time as a deputy district attorney by the end of the year.

In January 2018, Ms. Williams joined the Santa Clara County District Attorney’s Office. She is currently assigned to the Gangs unit and was previously assigned to the felony Family Violence Unit and the General Felonies Unit. In her free time, Ms. Williams enjoys mentoring underprivileged youth, running, eating, and watching her Texas Longhorns play.

Gabriel Negrete

Dept. of Family and Children’s Services, Santa Clara County



Gabriel Negrete is a Social Worker with the Department of Family and Children’s Services in Santa Clara County. He has over 18 years of experience working in both the child welfare and mental health fields.

Born and raised in East San Jose, Mr. Negrete attended schools in the area throughout his childhood. He obtained his AA Degree in Administration of Justice from Evergreen Valley College, and both his Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees from San Jose State University.

Marc Utsey

Probation Manager



Marc Utsey is a Probation Division Manager for the County of Santa Clara. He has worked for the department since 2000. He began his career with the department as a part time Juvenile Hall Counselor and has promoted through the ranks to Manager.

Marc has over 27 years with working with at-risk youth in Santa Clara County in different capacities. Marc earned a BS degree in Health Science and in 2000, he earned a Masters in Counseling Education with a Pupil Personnel Services credential from San Jose State. He is active in various professional organizations including the California Association of Probation Institution Administrators (CAPIA). In his spare time, he enjoys family time and golf.

Nydia Smith
Supervising Probation Officer



Nydia Smith was born in Puerto Rico to a Mexican-American mother and Black father who were both in the Air Force. Ultimately, they landed in Los Angeles after her parents divorced. They were poor and lived under the poverty line. For years Ms. Smith and her siblings slept in the same bed while their mother slept in a twin bed all in the same room. Ms. Smith struggled and worked hard not to succumb to the many pressures which come with living in a gang-entrenched neighborhood until she moved away to attend San Diego State University and then San Jose State University, where Ms. Smith earned a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Administration of Justice with a minor in Sociology. Upon completing her internship with the Santa Clara County Probation Department, she began working part-time in Juvenile Hall.

In 1999, Ms. Smith became a Deputy Probation Officer where she has had the wonderful opportunity of working in both the Juvenile and Adult divisions. In 2013, Ms. Smith promoted to Supervising Probation Officer and proudly serves as the Union President for the Peace Officers in the Probation Department. Ms. Smith also proudly serves on the executive board of the San Jose/Silicon Valley branch of the NAACP and is involved in examining the practices, policies and processes through a racial-equity lens to effect change.

Alicia Luong
UC Berkeley



Alicia Luong is a fourth-year student at UC Berkeley who has taken on a variety of roles in the Vietnamese-American community and in the classroom. She volunteers with local community-based non-profit and student organizations like Vietnamese American Roundtable, Hoa Khôi Liên Trường (Miss Vietnam of Northern California Intercollegiate), Cal Vietnamese Students Association, Cal VSA's VISION mentorship program, and Vietnamese American Professional Women's Association of Silicon Valley.

Alicia was formerly a Youth Advisory Member for Allcove, where she outreached, collaborated with, and represented youth needs in the development of Allcove's newly opened integrated mental health and primary care sites. As a budding psychologist, Alicia plans to intersect her dedication to the Vietnamese-American youth community with her foundation in academia.

She is currently a research assistant in a clinical psychology lab at UC Berkeley, helping to advance research in interpersonal emotional regulation. She hopes to soon achieve her Bachelor's and, eventually, Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D) degrees in order to practice clinical psychology in a community health care center in the near future.

Fatima Ortiz
Deputy Public Defender

Fatima Ortiz is a practicing attorney with 15 years of experience in criminal defense. Ms. Ortiz obtained her juris doctorate from Golden State University School of Law in 2006 and has been serving her community as a public defender ever since. She currently works with the Santa Clara County Defender Defender's Office and is the supervising attorney for the South County division.

Alonso Garcia

Executive Director, California LAW Pathways



Mr. Garcia is a graduate from California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) with a double major in Liberal Studies and Criminal Justice. Alonso also obtained his graduate degree in Public Policy and Administration with a focus on Education Reform from CSUS.

Currently, Mr. Garcia is employed by the Foundation for California Community Colleges as the Special Project Manager implementing the Immigration Legal Services project. The project aims to bring free immigration legal services to undocumented students attending California Community Colleges. Additionally, he also oversees the California Leadership-Access-Workforce (Cal LAW).

In this capacity, Mr. Garcia supports Cal LAW to establish a pipeline of diverse students from high schools, community colleges, four-year institutions, and law schools into law or law-related careers so that the legal profession reflects the diverse population of the State of California. Mr. Garcia is champion and an advocate for change to help meet the needs of underserved areas or populations.

Nigel Williams

Supervising Group Counselor (Juvenile Hall)

Mr. Williams joined Santa Clara County Probation in 1998, as an Extra-Help Group Counselor. Prior to that Mr. Williams worked various jobs in the community such as an After-School Coordinator, Public Safety Assistant at San Jose State Police Department and as a Youth Advisor at a Child Development Center in San Jose, Ca. During his tenure at the Probation Department, Mr. Williams helped develop new standards for our Home Confinement Program in which more youth can remain in the community with their families, receiving additional services prior to being incarcerated. Mr. Williams is a graduate of San Jose State University, where he majored in Sociology. When he's not busy with work you can find him with his teenage son, operating a small business, President of a non-profit, or traveling the world.

Carl Jiang

Yale Law Graduate



Carl Jiang is a litigation associate at Sidley Austin LLP in Chicago. He graduated from Yale Law School in 2020. During law school, he served as an Executive Editor of the Yale Law & Policy Review, the Co-chair of the Clinical Student Board, and the Co-founder of the Youth Justice Project. He was also involved in the Challenging Mass Incarceration Clinic and Legislative Advocacy Clinic.

He will serve as a law clerk for Judge Edmond Chang at the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois during the 2021-2022 term and Judge Richard Clifton at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit during the 2022-2023 term.

Prior to law school, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, taught Seventh Grade English through Teach for America, and volunteered as a peacemaker in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Carl is a proud alumnus of the Chicago Urban Debate League.

Bea Pangilinan

Deputy Director of Asian Law Alliance



Bea Pangilinan is a Deputy Director at the Asian Law Alliance. At ALA, she supervises staff and coordinates client services. Aside from providing direct representation to clients, she has been active in providing community education on different topics in immigration and advocating on issues affecting the immigrant community. She also regularly provides training to attorneys, students and community members on naturalization, DACA, and other forms of immigration relief. Since 2007, she has co-organized large immigration workshops to provide consultations and application assistance to thousands of residents.

In the past years, Bea worked with the county and community-based organizations on coordinating a response to the DACA program, advocated for the current policy on protecting Santa Clara County residents from ICE detention, served as the liaison between the CBO's and USCIS, and participated in campaigns to make quality legal services accessible to the community. She is also licensed to practice in New York and California.

Violeta Garcia

Dept. of Family and Children Services Supervising Social Worker



Violeta Garcia is currently the Social Worker Supervisor of the Dually Involved Youth (DIY) Unit in the Department of Family & Children's Services. The DIY Unit is composed of a multi-disciplinary team of Social Workers, Probation Officers, and Behavioral Health Advocates tasked with assisting young people who are simultaneously system involved with Probation and Child Welfare. In 2014 Violeta was one of the first Social Workers in the DIY unit and since then, has been teaming with agency and community partners to improve outcomes for DIY families.

In 2008 she began working with the County of Santa Clara as Group Counselor in Juvenile Hall and as an Adoption Social Worker for FamiliesFirst. Violeta's professional desire to service the community comes from her educational experiences. She received a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Sociology from the University of California Santa Cruz and a Master's in Social Work from the University of Michigan. Her personal desire to service the community comes from being raised by non-English speaking migrant parents who had a strong work ethic and instilled the value of being heard to be seen.

Laura Palazzolo

Lincoln Law School



Laura Palazzolo is the dean at Lincoln Law School of San Jose. Prior to becoming Dean, Ms. Palazzolo was a senior litigation associate at Berliner Cohen.

Lincoln Law School sponsors both a Patent Clinic and a Small Business Clinic for Bay Area entrepreneurs. Lincoln also manages the Peer Court program, which provides hands-on courtroom-like experience for high school students in a restorative justice environment.

HaNhi L. Tran

Deputy District Attorney, Santa Clara County



HaNhi L. Tran is a Deputy District Attorney for the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office. As a community-based prosecutor, HaNhi focuses on crime prevention initiatives and serves as a liaison to the Vietnamese community. HaNhi grew up in the Little Saigon community in Orange County, California, where her working-class parents initially settled after fleeing Vietnam as boat refugees. She earned her Bachelor's Degree from Harvard University and her Law Degree from UCLA.

HaNhi joined the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office in 2012 where she has worked on numerous teams including the Family Violence Unit, Major Narcotics Vendor Prosecution Unit, and Community Prosecution Unit. She is a member of the District Attorney's Office Diversity Committee, the East San Jose PEACE Partnership Intimate Partner Violence Workgroup, and Santa Clara County's multi-disciplinary Domestic Violence Death Review Team. HaNhi volunteers as a Board Member for the Northern California Chapter of the National Asian Pacific Islander Prosecutors Association (NAPIPA) and is actively involved with the Vietnamese-American Professional Women's Association of Silicon Valley (VAPW) where she serves as Vice President and co-chairs the Mentorship Program supporting high school young women.

Elisa Carias

Probation Officer



Elisa Carias is a Probation Division Manager with the Santa Clara County Probation Department. During her 22 years with the Department, she has been a champion for restorative practices that are inclusive of youth, victims, and communities.

She enjoys working collaboratively with system partners and has been a leader in changing local policies and procedures in the treatment of commercially sexually exploited youth. Elisa is regarded for her extensive knowledge, experience, and training in Restorative Justice Principles, victim centered work, and approaches that protect, empower, and uplift vulnerable populations. She has shared her expertise by providing training locally and nationally.

She received a B.A. from the University of California, Santa Cruz and a J.D. from Santa Clara University School of Law. She enjoys giving back through her service as a Board Member of the California American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (CAPSAC) and Silicon Valley Shop with a Cop.

Myriah Raymond
Court Intern/Law Student



Myriah was born in Corpus Christi, Texas and has been living in the Bay Area for 10 years. She is currently a summer intern for Judge Julia Alloggiamento in San Jose, CA and the Coast Guard Office of Legal Services Command in Alameda, CA. She graduated from University of California, Davis in 2016 with a B.S. History and is currently studying for her Juris Doctorate at Santa Clara University, School of Law and will begin her third year in August.

Prior to law school, she worked for a non-profit organization in Oakland, CA, where she helped guide youth in education. Subsequently, Myriah volunteered with an immigration clinic assisting lawyers and clients on issues related to immigration status, applications, and translations. She has a passion for social justice and hopes to have a career where she can make a difference in the community.

Jose Gonzalez
Deputy Public Defender, Santa Clara County



Jose Gonzalez grew up in San Mateo and was raised by immigrant working-class parents. He attended college at UC Berkeley and went to law school at Santa Clara University. He has always wanted to be a Public Defender so that he could be an advocate for marginalized communities. His first job was working with his father as a gardener during his breaks from school. He recalls his father telling him as a young boy that he had to pursue higher education so that he wouldn't have to do the back breaking work that he did daily.

During law school, Mr. Gonzalez interned with the Northern California Innocence Project, Silicon Valley Law Foundation, and the Santa Clara Public Defender's office. He was hired this past spring and now represents clients who have been accused of misdemeanor offenses. The highlight of his days includes having his client's stand next to him in court and considers it an honor to be able to speak on their behalf.

Dr. Robert Burns
SVUDL



An avid debater in high school, Rob left the debate community for a time to pursue graduate studies in philosophy and theology. After several years of teaching graduate and undergraduate students, he returned to debate and founded and coached a policy debate program at Lindenwood University in Missouri. For his work training first-year college debaters, he was awarded the Dick Stein Coach of the Year Award in 2013.

Turning his focus to high school, Rob founded the policy debate team at North Star Academy in Newark, NJ where he taught speech and debate to every grade level from 2014-2018. During his time at North Star, Rob coached the co-champions of the 2018 Harvard Invitational Debates in the policy division and two of his varsity teams finished as Quarterfinalists and Octafinalists at the 2018 Tournament of Champions. He became the Director of Programming at the Silicon Valley Urban Debate League in 2019.

Robert Casas
Law Enforcement



Deputy Lazaro Roberto Casas was born and raised in San Jose, CA. He had a challenging childhood as both of his parents were drug users or drug addicts. As one of nine other children that he nearly raised himself, at the age of 13, he contacted the Santa Clara County Child Protective Services and was placed into Foster Care. He was very fortunate in that his very first family was a perfect fit for him.

In 2005, he joined the Marine Corps, where he served his country for eight years and completed multiple combat tours to Iraq and Afghanistan. He ended his military career in 2013 and began the transition back into civilian life. He did not anticipate having as difficult of a transition as he did and realized that he had not yet processed his childhood trauma or the trauma endured during eight combat deployments. He spent the next five years going to school and coming to terms with his past.

Deputy Casas began pursuing a career in law enforcement in 2018, and in 2020 was hired by the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office. Deputy Casas has been with the Sheriff's Office for almost one year now and looks forward to serving his community and country once again. He believes that with his background, he has a unique set of experiences that will help him make the change that he wishes to see in the community that saved my life.

Deserie Escobar
Probation Officer



Deserie Loreda Escobar was born and raised in San Jose and attended public schools until she graduated from Mt. Pleasant High School where she was on the softball team and a cheerleader.

Officer Escobar openly speaks to students about the academic struggles she experienced throughout her educational journey, including the lack of encouragement she received from guidance counselors and teachers. However, she also shares that it only takes one person to believe in you to follow your dreams. In her case, although she was not the best student in her class, her high school Spanish teacher told Officer Escobar that her grades did not define who she was or where she was going in my life, and she encouraged Officer Escobar to follow her dreams.

Officer Escobar's dream job was to become a Social Worker. Having been surrounded by family members "in the system," she often found herself struggling with decisions the Court system made. She went to San Jose State University and earned her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work.

Officer Escobar worked several jobs to pay for college. While working for the Board of Supervisors, City of San Jose, and Children's Shelter, her passion for advocating for youth only strengthened. She eventually transitioned to the Probation Department as a Counselor and ultimately a Probation Officer, where she's been working with youth her whole career. Officer Escobar is also a Trustee on the Board at Lincoln Law School and founded a Women's Support Network for Probation Staff, Probation-Women Out of Work (P-WOW).

Her passion continues to be working with our community's youth and continue the message to follow their dreams.

Susie Rivera

Vice President of Youth Voice Initiatives and Executive Director of Santa Clara County



Susie currently serves as the VP of Youth Voice Initiatives and Executive Director of Santa Clara County for Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) and has been with FLY since 2001. Over the years, Susie has worn many different hats, from overseeing programs, bridging programs and fund development, and working with partners in our community and systems. Throughout her tenure at FLY she has remained grounded in the importance of youth voice and youth transformation, and oversees all youth voice initiatives internally and externally at FLY.

Additionally, Susie is a Lecturer at San Jose State University in the College of Health and Human Sciences, teaching in the departments of Justice Studies and Public Health for classes titled Drugs and Society, Juvenile Justice, Justice Management and Ethics, Media and Justice, Police and Society, Penal Policy, Race, Class, Gender, and the Law, and an

upper division writing workshop.

She has been teaching since 2007 and through teaching she hopes to impact the next wave of individuals who will be working in the system, encouraging them to utilize a human rights approach while being positive change agents and advocating for and with our community members.

Susie earned her B.S. in Criminal Justice Administration and Sociology from San Jose State University. She also received her Master in Justice Studies there, and her thesis focused on the effects of incarceration on Latinx/Chicanx families and Women in the system. In addition, Susie obtained her Juris Doctorate, her Certification as a Professional Coactive Coach (CPCC), Certification in Fundraising Management from Indiana University, and Certification as a Victim Offender Mediator. She sits on many leadership circles throughout the Bay Area and currently holds a position on the Policy Council for Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits where she is able to advocate for the nonprofit sector as a whole.

Susie was born and raised in East San Jose where she witnessed and experienced first-hand many of the issues confronting our youth. She has dedicated her career helping young people reach their best selves while simultaneously doing system change work to ensure the system becomes more equitable and just. Rivera has received awards for her efforts in the community, including an award for Diversity Enhancement, the Hispanic Heritage Leadership Award from the NFL, and the Outstanding Lecturer Award at SJSU.

Susie has three adult children, a grandchild, and still resides in the beautiful East Foothills of San Jose with her husband John. In her free time she is a pit bull enthusiast and spends lots of time training her dogs, cruising on a Sunday afternoon in her classic car, traveling to new places, and enjoying the beauty of nature.

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