

Growing Community Resilience Through Safe, Healthy Places

STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA





The Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC) created a cross-sector, resident-led coalition of 100+ partners that centers trust, belonging, and healing as the foundation for an entire community. By restoring local parks with national nonprofit partners like Trust for Public Land, RSSC helped residents improve access to recreational and green spaces to improve health. With the support of The BUILD Health Challenge®, RSSC opened the Community Resilience Hub in 2025 to provide a dedicated home for community resilience that brings residents together – a permanent space where people feel safe, connected, and valued inside their own neighborhood. The Hub is home to ongoing community collaborations and partnerships that organize events to connect residents to resources, develop programming that equips youth leaders to self-advocate, and fuel community-rooted work for systems change.

COMMUNITY IMPACT



Restored Williams Brotherhood Park with a new mural and handball court in 2024, improving recreational access to residents



Unlocked \$6.6 million in public funding for parks and water access in the region, with a measured improvement on [ParkScore](#).



Achieved 501(c)(3) status for the Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC), a community coalition of 100+ partners, after a decade of organizing in South Stockton.



Opened the Community Resilience Hub in 2025, a permanent community-owned space for coalition coordination, resident organizing, and youth leadership development.



Facilitated certification of over 150 people trained through Trauma Transcended 360, enabling local practitioners to conduct trauma-informed training for others in the community.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH





Investing in People and Building on Existing Assets

Leo Martinez, communications and digital story director for Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC), has watched it happen many times: A resident comes into the Community Resilience Hub as a program participant. Maybe they showed up for a resource fair, a community meeting, or just because a neighbor invited them. And then something changes: They're now helping plan events, speaking at convenings, and bringing in other people or organizations. They stop being someone who attends and start being someone the work belongs to. "That shift, from being served to becoming a leader in their own community, is what I try to document and amplify," said Martinez. "It's also what reminds me why the work matters. My job is to ensure that the existing leadership, resilience, and creativity already present here are visible, and that the people doing the work feel seen within it."

South Stockton has many assets: residents who know and love their community deeply, leaders who keep showing up even through decades of disinvestment, and a collective will to build something durable for the future. The Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC) is a community coalition of more than 100 partners that has been organizing for a decade. Nonprofits, government agencies, health networks,

and community members first came together to solve local problems like closing a corner market that had become the epicenter for dangerous activities in the neighborhood. By working together with local organizations and law enforcement, they were able to successfully change policy and shut down the market. This early victory led the coalition to realize that through collective effort, effective and enduring change could be made. Since then, RSSC has been building infrastructure around the leadership, knowledge, and relationships that already exist in South Stockton.

For the first decade of its existence, RSSC operated under a fiscal sponsor. In 2024, it became its own independent 501(c)(3) — creating a more sustainable and efficient vehicle for coordinating the long-term, community-driven change that is important to the residents of South Stockton. With the support of The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD), RSSC expanded partnerships that revitalized parks and increased access to waterways. In 2025, RSSC opened the Community Resilience Hub to provide a dedicated home for the community to meet, organize, and build a future together.



South Stockton's Historical Context

In the 1930s, federal housing maps drew red lines around neighborhoods like South Stockton — a practice called **redlining** — which systematically denied home loans to communities of color and blocked the wealth that property ownership builds. As those neighborhoods fell to neglect, the “War on Drugs” reshaped the community again by taking young men, stability, and what remained of institutional trust from the community. By 2012, Stockton had become the largest U.S. metropolitan area to declare bankruptcy.

The effects are still being felt today. Residents of South Stockton live, on average, 20.5 years fewer than people in more affluent parts of the same city. Opioids have taken 114 lives in South Stockton alone, with Black and African American residents accounting for 75.3% of those deaths. And only 15.4% of third-grade students living in South Stockton are proficient in English. These are all compounding consequences of inequitable policies and systems that have shaped life in South Stockton for generations.

Dyane Medina, a community health worker from Dignity Health's St. Joseph's Medical Center, knows what this looks like on a day-to-day level. “Stockton is super diverse, which is a huge strength, but it also brings a lot of challenges,” she said. “There’s a history of community violence, low educational attainment, high unemployment. And South Stockton has it the worst because of the effects of redlining. Our crosstown freeway literally cut off the whole south side of the community.”

Many residents do not trust systems and services after decades of empty promises and extracted resources. RSSC recognizes the ways in which structural racism is embedded into health care and social service delivery, with residents being at higher risk for a range of medical conditions and lower quality care for many Stockton families. This can look like denial of care or experiences of health care providers failing to treat a resident with dignity and respect. RSSC wants to reverse the long-term psychological and medical toll of racism on communities like South Stockton. Through a number of community-led initiatives, RSSC is improving health equity by building community capacity and power. Building a coalition with this history in mind requires earning deep trust through sustained engagement and shared decision-making. “Real collaboration isn’t about MOUs or shared deliverables,” described Martinez. “It’s about whether the people in the room trust each other enough to be honest, and whether that trust was built over time or just assumed.”

Building Trust, Power and Accountability for the Residents of South Stockton

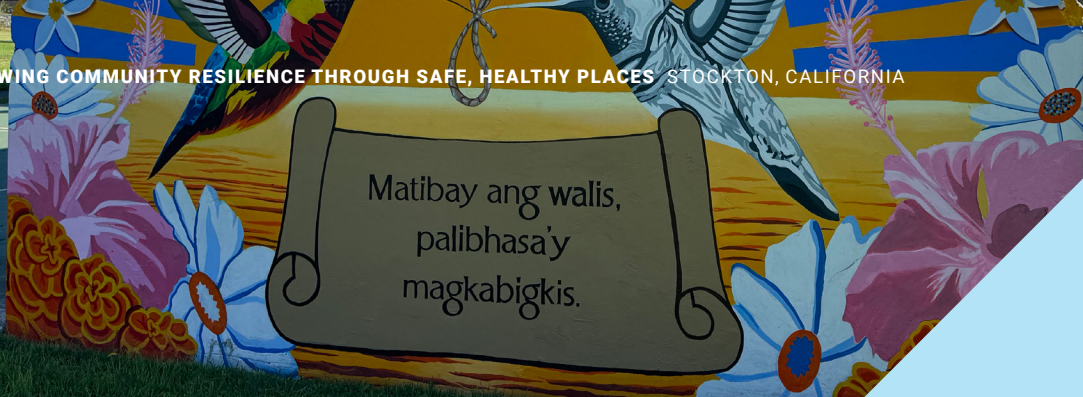
Despite this history, there is real community power in South Stockton, and RSSC has spent years building on it. “What BUILD made possible was a more intentional, sustained collaboration across sectors, with enough infrastructure to actually hold that collaboration together over time,” reflected Martinez.

RSSC runs on a core belief: that complex problems affecting a whole community can’t be solved by any single organization working alone. The coalition uses a collective impact approach: bringing nonprofits, government agencies, residents, and other sectors together around a shared definition of the problem and a coordinated plan to solve it. RSSC is the connective tissue among South Stockton partners and keeps communication flowing, making sure everyone is accountable to each other and to the community they serve. One manifestation of this is a deep investment in resident and youth engagement. RSSC helps coordinate the 12-member Youth Advisory Council whose young leaders have collected data, co-hosted public forums, and taken housing equity arguments directly to City Hall. RSSC also builds relationships in the community through Neighborhood Trust Builders, who show up door-to-door, on the phone, and at community events as multilingual bridges between RSSC and the neighbors it serves.

RSSC’s commitment to engaging the community and centering its needs also means being accountable for

measuring outcomes and results. The coalition uses Results-Based Accountability, a planning framework that starts from one question: what does a healthy, thriving South Stockton look like? This enables RSSC to measure its work against community-defined priorities, a method that ensures that programming and initiatives are driven by and for the community. Progress is tracked publicly through the South Stockton Promise Zone Data Scorecard, so residents and partners can see for themselves how they are collectively moving the needle. RSSC’s overarching community goals are to: create awareness and advocate for the strengths and needs of South Stockton; align long-term strategies and resources to improve South Stockton into a coordinated plan with empowered residents at the center; and develop civic engagement structures to provide residents a voice in decision-making. This work focuses on a wide range of issues — from healthy lives, safety, neighborhood transformation, to workforce development. Each of RSSC’s areas of focus has its own goals and measurements and leans on a different cross-section of partners to make progress.





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Greening South Stockton: Parks as a Public Health Strategy

Five years ago, San Joaquin County — home to Stockton — identified parks as a public health strategy in the **Community Health Improvement Plan**, and Dignity Health's St. Joseph's Medical Center reached out to the Trust for Public Land (TPL) for the first time. TPL started with mapping the area's parks: where parks were located, what gaps existed, and where residents were most exposed to heat or air pollution. From there, they went deeper by listening to residents directly. Through that early work, TPL connected with Dignity Health's St. Joseph's Medical Center, San Joaquin County Public Health Department, and RSSC, laying the groundwork for a partnership that BUILD would later help accelerate.

Through focus groups at RSSC's annual South Stockton Resident Summits between 2023 and 2025, TPL gathered resident feedback; what they heard was clarifying. Bathrooms in neighborhood parks were permanently closed, making parks unusable for families. Many residents were driving significant distances to parks that felt safer and more maintained. The parks in South Stockton weren't functioning as the neighborhood anchors they could be.

When TPL, RSSC, and Dignity Health's St. Joseph's Medical Center attended the BUILD national conference together in Atlanta in September 2023, they shared experiences that helped inform their collective vision around Stockton's parks. "We got to hear from other awardees about the work they had done in their communities," said Sharon Sand from TPL. "It was super inspiring, and it was a great chance for us to be together to learn from other folks, but then to really work more closely together. It was a pivotal point for us." With time to spare before their flight, Sand suggested the partners visit Cook Park in Atlanta, a flood-protection park that combines ecological design with public art and community history. Walking through it together, the partners began imagining what that vision could look like in South Stockton.

One expression of that vision took shape at Williams Brotherhood Park, where RSSC led the restoration of a handball court in 2024, a sport with deep roots in Stockton culture. A local artist created a vibrant mural on the court that drew a large community celebration and helped activate the park. RSSC navigated sourcing funding for the park, with TPL

supporting mapping, data, and strategy, as well as hosting a park equity convening at the 2024 Resident Summit that brought together organizations working on green space alongside the state agency representatives who fund it.

The partnership's strategy also grew in an unexpected direction: water access. Stockton sits in the heart of the California Delta, yet residents have almost no public access to its waterways. Through the expanding network of relationships cultivated over the last few years, TPL connected with the Delta Sculling Center, a local organization getting people of all abilities out on the water. That relationship helped unlock a \$2 million grant to renovate the deteriorating public docks at Louis Park, a \$2.5 million Delta Conservancy planning grant, and a \$2.14 million acquisition grant toward a future Delta Aquatics Center — in total, more than \$6.6 million in public funding for parks and water access in the region.

The work in Stockton also seeded something larger in the region. Recognizing the potential benefits for the larger Central Valley, TPL launched a community of practice connecting organizations in Stockton, Fresno, and Bakersfield, hosting Park Funding Summits in all three cities in May 2026 to help communities access funding from California's Proposition 4 climate bond — an expansion that grew directly out of what RSSC and BUILD made possible in South Stockton. "The [BUILD] grant was a big impetus for growing this synergy," Sharon Sand reflected. "This collaboration and expansion and layering just keeps building."

The Hub as a Backbone for Building Leadership & Community

When more than 100 partners and stakeholders are involved, finding a reliable place to meet can be challenging. RSSC's work was initially distributed across different locations, without a reliable or permanent physical home. Building on their momentum, RSSC opened its Community Resiliency Hub in South Stockton in June 2025.

"The Hub gave us a permanent address," said Martinez. "It became a place where residents, partners, and youth leaders could consistently show up, build relationships, and organize together without starting from scratch every time." The Community Resiliency Hub is a physical expression of the community infrastructure being built in South Stockton. The Hub is a place where partners like Center Plate Farms, People's Empowerment Center, Shaw4Community, and AmeriCorps volunteers can come together and chart a course for South Stockton. It's a home for convenings where residents can shape program priorities and contribute to policy discussions, a place where the community can shift from participation to co-ownership of strategies for positive community change.



RSSC places resident leadership at the center, with shared decision-making and a deep respect for the voices of community leaders. Martinez explained that residents were: "Not invited in after decisions were already made, but present in shaping outreach, engagement strategies, and community priorities from the beginning. That's a harder thing to sustain than it sounds, and it required partners who were genuinely willing to follow community leadership rather than just gesture toward it."

In early 2024, South Stockton residents and the RSSC hosted a series of candidate forums. Candidates included those running for the county supervisor seats, commissioner, mayor, City Council, and Superior Court. Approximately 350 residents participated in forums in person, with more watching online. The forums were designed and facilitated by a committee of local residents and leaders who gathered questions, introduced candidates, and provided residents with an opportunity to give input and learn more about civic engagement. The forums are an example of the civic power RSSC is building in South Stockton, organized from the inside out — exactly the kind of engagement the Hub was built to make possible.

The Awakening: Creating Spaces to Feel Safe and Connected

The week the Hub opened in 2025, RSSC shut down San Joaquin Street for an unusual community event. The Awakening Block party brought more than 500 residents for a day of healing, drug and overdose prevention, youth empowerment, and community safety. Center Plate Farms and AmeriCorps volunteers distributed fresh produce to every family in attendance. The People's Empowerment Center facilitated healing circles. Youth leaders were active in organizing this event, taking leadership roles in planning, peer outreach, and fentanyl prevention education — all ways of modeling peer-to-peer advocacy grounded in lived experience of residents.

"It was loud and joyful, and it was also deeply intentional work. That event reinforced something we kept coming back to throughout the BUILD project: systems change is not only about services or policy. It's about whether people feel safe, connected, and valued inside their own neighborhood," recalled Martinez. The Awakening is a prime example of the culmination of RSSC's intentional work that blends community engagement, collaboration, and how you model a community building its own source of power.

Approaching Health Equity from a Trauma-Informed Lens

RSSC's vision includes reducing chronic illness and health disparities for the people of South Stockton.

This includes access to the basics like healthy foods, health insurance, and medical services and facilities. In addition, RSSC believes that health outcomes are about more than access to medical care and individual responsibility. "We must also reduce the root causes for chronic illnesses, like trauma and environmental factors," their annual report reads. To promote healing in a community like South Stockton, acknowledging the impacts of trauma on the lives of residents is a critical step. To deepen that healing, RSSC works to ensure that the partner organizations and the systems residents turn to for help are equipped to provide trauma-informed care.

In partnership with the San Joaquin Justice League, County Behavioral Health Services, the Children's Home of Stockton, Amelia Ann Adams Whole Life Center, Pioneering Restoration and Elevating Voices of Advocacy, Idealism and Leadership (PREVAIL), and Dignity Health's St. Joseph's Medical Center, RSSC has more recently invested in advancing their mission of advancing trauma-informed systems in South Stockton by building capacity through training and certifications. About three years ago, a core group started holding monthly meetings to organize the training in the community. The Trauma Transcended 360 Initiative works to reduce root causes of trauma and improve mental and behavioral health across South Stockton. In the last few years, four community organizations participated in a Trauma Informed Leadership Team (TILT) led by the Justice League of San Joaquin. Staff members from RSSC partner organizations each earned a Trainer certification, with one achieving a certification as a Lead Trainer. The result is lasting: trauma-informed expertise is now rooted in South Stockton itself, with the ability to grow and expand without depending on anyone from outside. Medina is one of the master trainers through the initiative, and she describes how the training uses a "house" metaphor to anchor the curriculum: The soil

represents both trauma and resilience, factors that are present in someone's life. The foundation is built from an understanding of trauma and stress alongside equity and cultural humility. Four pillars of a house rise from there: safety and stability; collaboration and empowerment; co-regulation and relationship-building; and resilience and recovery.

What the training aims to do, Medina explained, is fundamentally shift how people see someone they are working with. "We want to shift how people see other people from a deficit — like, what's wrong with you? — to look at them as: what happened to you? What is the underlying need that you're communicating in the best way you know how?" She's seen what happens when that lens is missing. From her experience in healthcare settings, she knows that staff often come to work having experienced their own traumas, and sometimes they can get transferred to a patient, many of whom are already from disadvantaged communities. "I call it grumpy people rubbing off their grumpiness on sick people. It's not unique to a hospital, and it happens in agencies across the board," Medina said.

The design of the TILT training was intentional from the start: RSSC and its partners wanted experienced trainers who came from the community itself. The certification program placed important tools and power in the hands of Stockton's community organizations who now conduct Trauma Transcended training for both residents and other local organizations. "We didn't want to be bringing in people from other areas," said Medina. "We wanted local experts. These people have lived through this trauma. They know where the people they're talking to are coming from." The training offers tools and concrete solutions that help people understand how to empower someone to make decisions for themselves, and how to communicate in ways that don't retraumatize.

Participants in the training have experienced many “aha moments.” Medina remembered one time when she spoke about how experiencing trauma involves a loss of autonomy, and how advocacy and action can be a path towards healing. One training participant, who founded a mental health and wellness organization after his sister was killed by a drunk driver, chimed in. Medina explained: “He said, ‘That makes sense why I felt so motivated to start this. It’s a way of taking back power. You’re honoring that person, but also turning it into a movement.’”

At a basic level, the training helps people recognize their own trauma and better understand the context of the lives of the people they’re serving through a trauma-informed lens. This understanding shifts communication so that trust becomes the center of relationships. “This training helps to improve communication so that the people that come to them for help actually get the help and continue to build trust so they’ll continue reaching out for help,” said Medina.

The training initiative also builds relationships and trust across the organizations that participate, creating a ripple effect of new initiatives that benefit the community. RSSC provided the trauma-informed training for free to the staff at St. Mary’s, a local shelter. Continuing to build on that and other positive experiences, St. Mary’s is collaborating with Dignity Health’s St. Joseph’s Medical Center to build recuperative care to help patients transition from the hospital to a stable place to recover, and then on to long-term housing. Many partnerships grew directly out of the relationships built through the training work. By the most recent count, more than 150 people have been trained through the Trauma Transcended 360 Initiative, across public agencies, nonprofits, housing organizations, and health networks.



Navigating the Challenges of Coalition-Building



Building a coalition is one thing; holding it together under political or environmental pressures is another. Over the last few years, the political environment in San Joaquin County caused some organizations to pull back from the coalition out of fear of political backlash. A temporary layoff of all RSSC staff in 2025 resulted in many staff signing volunteer agreements to keep the work moving forward. In addition, a shooting in Stockton impacted many families and required RSSC to pause its coalition activities in order to hold space for a community in grief.

When a coalition is rooted in its community, sometimes it has to accept people stepping back. Sometimes it needs to acknowledge differences. Sometimes it must find creative ways to continue the work. Other times it needs to pause and reset. RSSC needed to take time to regroup and refocus. “You can’t rush this kind of work,” said Martinez. “Not because of bureaucracy or logistics, but because trust is the actual infrastructure. Everything else — the partnerships, the programming, the policy conversations — sits on top of that. And trust takes time, consistency, and showing up even when there’s nothing to announce.”

Building an Institution that Belongs to the Community

In 2024, after a decade of operating under a fiscal sponsor, RSSC became its own independent 501(c)(3). The board expanded to include new leadership by recruiting new members with fundraising and advocacy capacity. Executive Director RC Thompson, ACSW, described this moment as a celebration of a once small project into a “cornerstone of progress and unity.”

Transitioning to a nonprofit is of deep significance for South Stockton. Becoming independent means the coalition now has the structural autonomy to direct its own resources, set its own agenda, and sustain itself into the future. The organization that started as a grassroots effort to close a corner market is now an independent, self-determined institution that’s building for the long term.

Looking ahead, RSSC is exploring blending funding strategies that align public health prevention resources, California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) community support, and workforce development pathways

to find a sustainable pathway forward. The coalition is also hoping to influence county systems to embed trauma-informed language and practices in the future. “Residents already know what their community needs,” reflected Martinez. “The most important thing we can do is build infrastructure that makes space for that knowledge to lead, and then stay consistent enough that people actually trust the space is real.”

San Joaquin Street, June 28th, 2025. The street is full of people. Music is playing. Elders are sitting together in the shade. Kids are running. Fresh produce in the hands of families. A healing circle on one corner. Over 500 friends and neighbors together in a space they felt was theirs. Youth leaders working the crowd, talking about prevention, safety, and what they want their neighborhood to be. South Stockton is building what it wanted and needed for itself. That is what a coalition of more than 100 partners, a decade of trust-building, and a community that never stopped showing up looks like when it finally has a permanent home.



The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD) invests in multi-sector, community-centered partnerships that transform systems and elevate community power to advance health and racial justice.

Through learning, connecting, and amplifying these local initiatives, BUILD champions the national movement for health equity and moves attention, resources, and action upstream to support vital community conditions for health and well-being across the United States.

The BUILD Model for Transforming Community Health



Bold

Drive fundamental shifts in policy and sustainability, creating systems-level changes through a lens of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity.



Upstream

Focus on the social, environmental, and economic factors that have the greatest influence on the health of a community, rather than on access or care delivery.



Integrated

Align the practices and perspectives of cross-sector partners under a shared vision, establishing new roles while continuing to draw upon the strengths of each partner.



Local

Prioritize the diverse lived experiences, voices, and leadership of neighborhood residents and community members throughout all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.



Data-Driven

Use varied forms of data from both clinical and community sources as tools to identify key needs, measure meaningful change, and facilitate transparency amongst stakeholders in order to generate actionable insights.



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