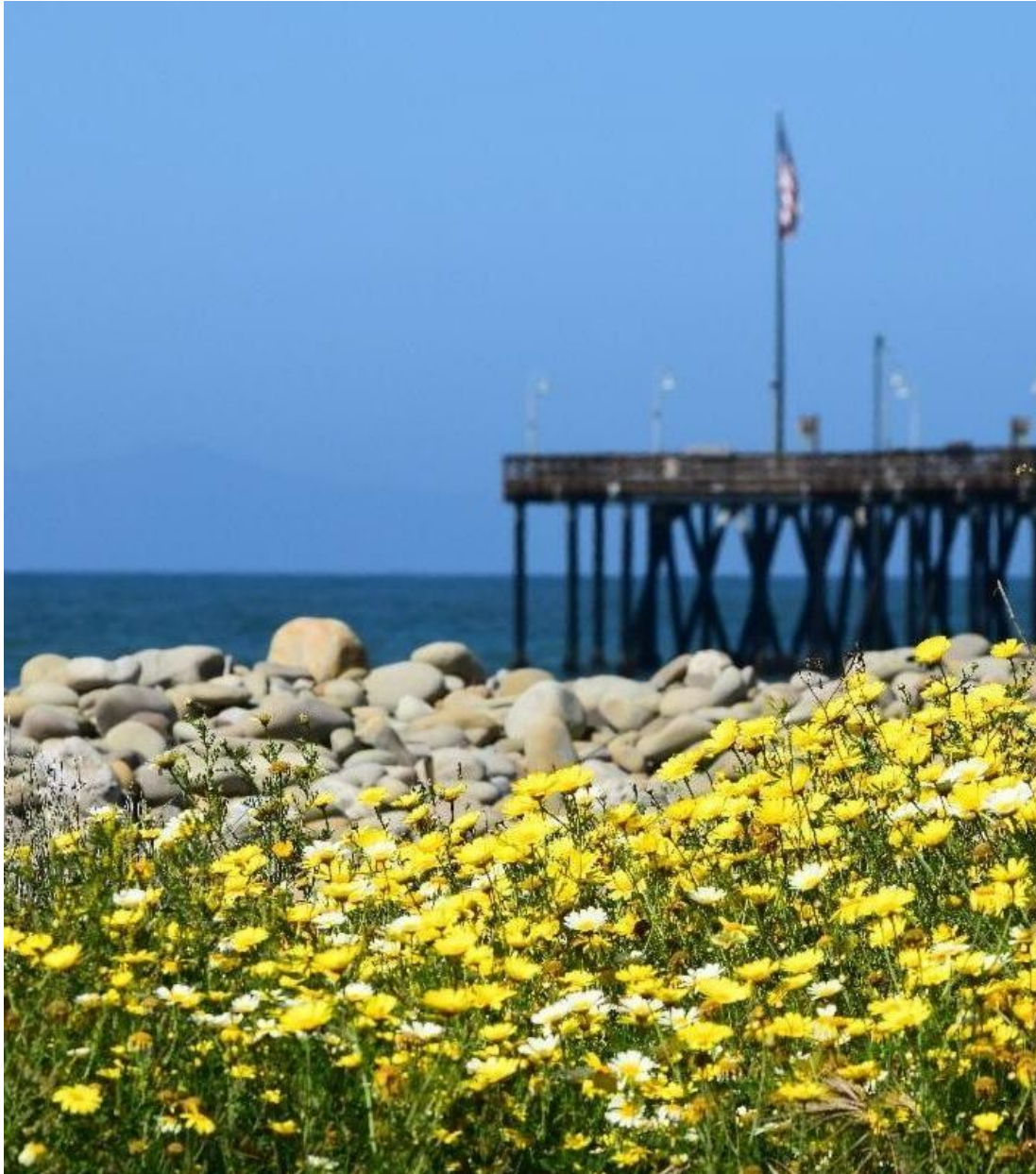


COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Issue 44 • Spring 2025



Plática con Café Podcast Series



Our community is facing ever-shifting drug trends that may harm those we care about. We sit down to review commonly asked questions and how best we can respond as a community. Join the conversations and stay informed!

Episode 6: Why Talking About Substances is Important. Everything is a process.

In this episode, Erika discusses the importance of talking about substance use from an early age, starting in elementary school. She suggests that parents talk proactively, rather than waiting for problems to arise.

She encourages parents to take advantage of everyday situations to talk with their children. She also highlights the need for parents to be well-informed and receive clear messages.

Finally, she mentions how cultural changes, such as marijuana legalization, make it even more necessary to have open conversations about the topic.

Grab your cafecito and enjoy!

Learn more:

www.positivepaths.org/platica

www.positivepaths.org/es/platica-con-cafe



Out & About With Alma & Erika

Connecting with the Community





By Alma Ixta & Erika Fernandez, Intensive Services Coordinators

Community outreach involves being in the community and learning from you about what matters, what concerns you, and the ways in which we can best work together to educate and strengthen our communities. We share our prevention messaging, informing families about the risks of marijuana, vaping, opioids, fentanyl, meth, and alcohol to help prevent and reduce alcohol and drug-related issues in our County. We strive to develop relationships with partner organizations and members in the community for collaboration and support regarding substance use prevention.

We offered presentations throughout the county on various prevention topics including opioids and fentanyl, marijuana and vaping, and alcohol and youth.

It's been a very busy few months! Some events we attended were: *Creando Comunidad Learning Series Opioids Presentation, Ventura Unified School District Resource Fair, GradNation Summit Resource Fair, Agency 101, Foothill Technology High School Resource Fair, E.O.Green Junior High School Parent Presentation, Kamala School Vaping & Marijuana Parent Presentation, Dia de la Mujer Resource Fair, Santa Paula Unified School District Marijuana & Opioids Parent Presentation, 40th Annual Career Expo, RJ Frank Middle School Wellness Fair, Fillmore Unified School District Marijuana & Opioids Parent Presentation, City Of Port Hueneme 5K and Wellness Fair, and the RDV College and Career & Resource Fair.*

You can stay in touch with us by watching our [Plática con Café Podcast Series](#).

Highlights from Alma:

This quarter started off slow in January and February and by March we were very busy with several Back to School Nights as well as community events and parent presentations. I attended events in several cities of the county, including Moorpark, Camarillo, Santa Paula, Oxnard and Thousand Oaks. School events always bring a smile to my face when I see student's eyes light up as they hear new information. That tells me that my job was done when I see that they are learning new information, and it will make a difference in the choices they make.

It's hard being a working parent nowadays because we can't always supervise our children so when I'm able to speak to students I try to engage them in a way that will spark their interest to speak to me.

Being a parent never ends, no matter the age of our children, so it's important that we are always vigilant and knowledgeable about all the substances our kids are exposed to in their environment. One of the events that I attended that stood out for me was the **RJ Frank School Migrant Education Family Conference** in February. It was very well organized and there were several great workshops for parents to choose from. They provided breakfast and lunch for families. Many community organizations in attendance provided great resources and information. The organizers provided many great incentives for families to attend this event and families seemed very happy to be there taking advantage of all the great information provided.

Highlights from Erika:

The 1st quarter of the year started slow and then it picked up with events and presentations. It was a great start to the year 2025. I provided six presentations in the past three months in the community, mostly in schools. Presentations are my favorite because I get to share in detail all the information we have on how to prevent our youth from using drugs and it gives an opportunity for the audience to ask questions and share their thoughts and experiences.

I also attended nine events and was able to share our resources and educational materials with a lot more community members at these events. One of my favorite events was **Agency 101**, at the **Ventura County Office of Education** and like every year it was a total success. They had 46 agencies in attendance with resources and had 126 attendees. I received several requests for presentations from this event and it was great to see so many professionals that work with families take our prevention information to share it with their families.

Another wonderful event was the **Rio Del Valle College/Career and Resource Fair**. I had so many students come up to my table to ask me about the negative effects of vaping and marijuana use. It was a great opportunity to educate them on the harms of substance use and the resources we have in the county. I was surprised to see how many of the students loved our Plática con Café Podcast stickers and pens because of the coffee cup designs on them!

I look forward to seeing everyone in the community!



Just for Fun

Chickens Hatch New Hobby!



By Erika Fernandez, Intensive Services Coordinator

One piece of advice I tell parents all the time when they ask me how they can help their kids stay away from drugs and alcohol is to get them interested in a **hobby**. **Yes, a hobby!** Hobbies help us explore new things and learn more about ourselves and what we enjoy, they are rewarding. Having something to put your time and energy into can help with positive interactions, self-esteem, and release stress, which is good for maintaining mental health and wellness. Maintaining good mental health can help kids stay away from substance use.

A hobby my family and I started in 2020 during COVID turned out to be an investment. We raise **chickens** in our back yard. Just like any hobby, raising chicken takes a lot of time and energy. The kids must feed them, clean their coop, make sure they are picking up the fresh eggs daily, cleaning the eggs and storing them. Since then, the kids have become more resourceful, responsible, and can never say they are bored at my house because they can always clean out the chicken coop.

During this time of increasing egg prices, my family doesn't have to

worry about paying \$7 a dozen for eggs because we just go to the back yard and get an egg! Who knew that something the kids thought would be fun to do during COVID would benefit us financially in the future. It keeps the kids busy and helps our budget too! And we love our chickens!



Welcome to the Team: Ignacio Ixta

A Passion for the Community



Ignacio Ixta has a long career of community engagement and dedication. He began his career with Child Development Resources of Ventura County as a Family Services Specialist, creating Daddy and Me classes. He helped to develop transportation services for families at the Santa Paula Head Start program. In Arizona, he established the first marijuana coalition in the Phoenix area and brought together community members to help address the marijuana issue in schools. He took a position in the Diocese of Phoenix as a Hispanic Ministry Coordinator, working in Mesa, Arizona to bring cultural traditions into the parish.

Eventually, he returned to Ventura County, and worked in several state

prisons working with the inmate population providing spiritual retreats to help foster healing. He volunteered at both of our Ventura County jails as a chaplain for many years.

Ignacio began working at VCBH in 2015 as a Community Services Coordinator for Mental Health. He transferred to Prevention Services team in 2020. During the pandemic he helped to administer COVID testing throughout the county. He has been a part of the Overdose Prevention Program in collaboration with the Public Health Syringe Replacement Program helping to provide naloxone rescue kits and education to people in need. Ignacio was instrumental in opening the overdose prevention location on Saviers Road in Oxnard.

We are very fortunate to welcome Ignacio to our community health promotion team, working with Alma and Erika, as he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience.



CSUCI Alumni Spotlights: Erika Fernandez



Read about the CSUCI CCE first Alumni Spotlight of the Year featuring Erika Fernandez!

California State University, Channel Islands, Center for Community Engagement, By Diana Alfaro. Volunteer Engagement Ambassador

Erika Fernandez, a first-generation college student and graduate of CSU Channel Islands in 2013, double majored in Psychology and Sociology with an Emphasis on Institutions. She embarked on her academic and professional journey with a deep commitment to helping others. Her desire to pursue higher education was largely influenced by her parents, who, as immigrants, emphasized the importance of attending college to avoid a life of limited opportunities. Read more about Erika's journey.

Read more:

www.csuci.edu/communityengagement/spotlights/erika-fernandez.htm



Our Own Prevention Team Speaks at the Rx and Illicit Drug Summit in Nashville

Highlight on "Speak Up On Fentanyl" Campaign





Dan Hicks, Prevention Services Manager, and Simon Dixon, CEO, Idea Engineering, presented the award winning campaign “Inviting Teens to Speak Up: Prevention Messaging in the Age of Fentanyl.”

The Rx and Illicit Drug Summit, April 2025, is the largest, most influential event addressing this crisis, where strategies are shared and put into action. The theme was *Explore What's Working in Prevention, Deflection, Treatment, and Recovery*.

Youth overdose and poisoning deaths have exploded in recent years due to fentanyl contamination in fake pills and other drugs. When any one dose can result in overdose and death, the importance of preventing illicit drug use has never been clearer. But too often safety communications targeting youth run up against instinctive psychological reactance. Too often efforts to reduce stigma instead induce it. And prevention resources go underutilized without the right messaging.

In their workshop, they discussed what motivates teens and young adults and how to reach them with key prevention messaging. Through the lens of the “Speak Up” campaign developed by Ventura County Behavioral Health, they explored effective communications frameworks and campaign development processes to ensure your youth and young adult audiences can see themselves in your messaging. They discussed strategies for creating communications that truly encourage identity change, and the behavior change that results from that crucial step.

What a fabulous opportunity to VCBH to be given this wonderful opportunity to present this award winning campaign on a national stage! **Kudos to both Dan and Simon and the entire Idea Engineering team!**

Learn more:

Speak Up On Fentanyl

Fake pills are everywhere. People are dying every day and the numbers keep



Featured Prevention Partner Saving Lives Camarillo

New Insights & Campaigns for a Safer Community



Saving Lives Camarillo Coalition (SLC) attended the 2025 CADCA Forum, gaining valuable insights and new strategies to enhance prevention efforts in Ventura County. In Washington, D.C., the coalition met with Congresswoman Julia Brownley, the policy adviser of Senator Adam Schiff, and other California coalitions to explore future collaborations. We also had the privilege of meeting Dr. Bonnie Halpern-Felsher, founder of the Stanford REACH Lab, and SLC was honored to hear her speak at SLC's March Coalition Meeting.

- One of the key takeaways from the forum was the dangers of over-the-counter (OTC) medications. When misused or combined with other drugs, they can pose serious health risks, even death.
- SLC plans to launch an OTC Lockbox campaign to educate the public about the dangers of medications and encourage families to lock up medications.
- SLC partners with local pharmacies, schools, and health organizations to

prevent overdoses and promote responsible medication use.

Together, we can prevent medication-related harm and save lives.

Learn more:

[Saving Lives Camarillo](#)



Featured Website: Positive Paths

Check out our new Prevention Website

POSITIVE PATHS
Supporting Health • Preventing Harm

The best time to prevent substance use issues is before they begin. The second-best time is today. This website contains information and resources that can be used for outreach and education in schools, in the community, and for yourself and your loved ones.

Learn more about the many pathways toward healthier living.

Teens & Young Adults

Positive Paths

Supporting Health • Preventing Harm

The best time to prevent substance use issues is before they begin. The second-best time is today. This website contains information and resources that can be used for outreach and education in schools, in the community, and for yourself and your loved ones.

Learn more:

Positive Paths

www.positivepaths.org/



Staying in the Know: Latest Research from Industry Partners

Strong state policies in California and Massachusetts significantly reduced youth access to flavored tobacco products.

Truth Initiative, Jan. 31, 2025

In the face of rising sales of flavored e-cigarettes, state policies are critical to protecting young people, according to a report from the CDC Foundation and Truth Initiative. Two states in particular - California and Massachusetts - demonstrate the effect that strong state policies can have on reducing sales and limiting youth access to flavored nicotine.

Learn more:

[Truth Initiative](#)



Awareness Events - Past & Upcoming

National Fentanyl Awareness Day, April 29, unites major corporations, community groups, nonprofits, government agencies, schools, campuses and families to take action to protect young lives from deadly fentanyl and fake prescription pills.

While recent data shows progress in reducing overdose deaths from record highs, nearly half of teens still don't know that counterfeit prescription pills often contain lethal amounts of fentanyl.

This lack of knowledge is leading to tragic consequences—young people are dying simply because they didn't know the pill they took was fake. That's why we need to turn awareness into action.

Learn more:

fentanylawarenessday.org
www.coastventuracounty.org



National Prevention Week, May 11-17, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is a public education platform showcasing the work of communities and organizations across the country dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of substance use prevention and positive mental health.



We recognize that the important work of prevention happens every day. We created National Prevention Week to celebrate these year-round initiatives and the possibilities prevention brings.

Learn more:

www.samhsa.gov/about/digital-toolkits/prevention-week



Calendar

Community Meetings

- **Circle of Care Monthly Meeting**

One Step A La Vez

1st Wednesday of every month at 1:00 PM

- **Outreach Coordinator Meeting, OUHSD**

1st Wednesday of every month at 10:30 AM

Contact: teresa.telles@oxnardunion.org

- **Santa Paula Social Services Coalition Meeting**

3rd Thursday of every month at 2:00 PM

Contact: SPSocialServiceCoalition@gmail.com

Santa Paula Social Services Coalition

- **Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) Prevention Committee Meeting**

4th Tuesday every other month at 3:15 PM.

BHAB Prevention Committee



Stay Informed

Websites

- [Positive Paths](#)
- [COAST Ventura County](#)
- [Ventura County Behavioral Health](#)

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- www.facebook.com/PositivePathsVC/
- x.com/PositivePathsVC

Check out our Newsletters

- www.positivepaths.org/newsletter
-



About Us

Supporting Health – Preventing Harm

Prevention means working upstream to reduce alcohol and drug-related problems in our community. We are involved in outreach in our communities, educating and increasing awareness about the risks and realities of alcohol and drug misuse and abuse. Read about our Prevention Services initiatives and our work in Ventura County.



Contact Us



Interested in presentations or publications to share with your communities? Contact Us!

Intensive Services Coordinators:

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Ignacio Ixta: Ignacio.Ixta@ventura.org

STAY CONNECTED



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