



ABOVE:

PHOTO BY AMANDA YA.

PHOTO BY LISA JAMES.

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## Looking Back, an Exhibition of Powerful Documentary Photography by Youth In Merced

MERCED, CA – (AUGUST 13, 2013)

**Who:** Teen documentary photographers Southwest Merced/East Merced County area

**What:** Opening Reception, with live music

**When:** Saturday, August 24, 2013 from 6:00pm–9:00pm; open through September 30, 2013

**Where:** Roger J. Wyan Photography Gallery, 1812 Canal St., Studio 7 (2nd Fl)

A new exhibit of photography and multimedia by Merced-area teens explores some of the area's thorniest issues: homelessness, family drug abuse, and poverty. The result? A compelling body of work telling three, distinct stories:

"It's Not All Peaches and Cream Out There" is a photo essay by teens from Golden Valley High School. Their images tell a story about growing poverty and homelessness in southeast Merced, including "hidden homeless"—youth who "couch surf," staying at the homes of friends when they've lost their own. Participant Skylar Francise said, "Through this project, I've learned to step outside my comfort zone. I've gotten to understand people better through creating photo essays."

"Breaking The Cycle" includes still images and multimedia by teens at Valley Community High School about substance abuse and, in particular, its impact on multiple generations. The work includes the personal stories of two of the young photographers, and was used in middle- and high-school classroom presentations reaching over 300 youth, as well as at the Youth 2 Youth Leadership Conference held in March of this year as part of an advocacy campaign to reinstate funding for productive youth programs.

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The photos and multimedia from the project “Planada Rising” were created by teens from Granada High School and celebrate the hardscrabble-but-proud town through portraits of leaders fostering change. The multimedia soundtrack features a rap written and sung by student José Ramos, who will perform live at the opening reception.



When asked how why the youth focused on these stories Roger Wyan, Project Manager, said, “These topics were of their choosing. They wanted to tell stories that reflect their own lives or the lives of their friends. They didn’t shy away from difficult issues. I could not be prouder of what they have accomplished with little experience and in such a short time.”

### **About Venice Arts**

Venice Arts is a Los Angeles-based media arts organization that works with youth in Southern California and the Central Valley. It also implements projects, training programs, and film-based activities with communities around the world. Venice Arts’ mission is to ignite youths’ imagination, mentor their creativity, and expand their sense of possibility through high quality, accessible media-based arts education programs. Venice Arts also serves as a catalyst for people of all ages, living in low-income or underrepresented communities, to create and share personal and community stories through photography, film, and multi-media.



### **About Building Healthy Communities (BHC)**

This project is one of a number of programs in Southwest Merced/East Merced County funded by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. BHC, which launched in 2010, is a 10-year, \$1 billion statewide strategy to create meaningful policy and systems changes for residents of 14 communities that will result in youth and families who are healthy, safe from violence, and ready to learn.

Photos and multimedia available upon request.

ABOVE:

PHOTO BY MARIA MARTINEZ.

PHOTO BY NATHAN AU.

PHOTO BY SKYLAR FRANCISE.