

Saturday Extra: Helping kids get a jump on life

From the community

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Times guest commentary

Article Launched: 06/13/2008 11:03:12 PM PDT

INVESTING IN OUR young people is our community's collective responsibility. We all know that access to quality education, career development, as well as life skills and job training are necessary tools to becoming successful in life.

Many of our community's youth receive the support they need from their families, caregivers and teachers who strive every day to help them achieve their full potential. But for some youth, more help is needed.

Young people in Richmond and Bay Point have recently led discussions with elected officials, local government agencies and community-based organizations to bring additional services for youth and young adults.

They have told us what they need to give them the tools to succeed. As elected officials representing these two communities, we are listening, working with them, and taking action.

In the past week, we have opened two new youth and young adult centers in Contra Costa County — one in North Richmond called the Young Adult Empowerment Center, and another in Bay Point called YES. Both centers are places where young people can go to receive the services they need such as mentoring; life skills, employment and career guidance and training; high school equivalency courses; college level classes; access to health and social services; computer classes; twilight basketball, and other recreational activities.

We are able to open these youth centers even during a time of difficult financial challenges because of a unique partnership we have developed between public and nonprofit agencies.

This partnership includes Contra Costa County government agencies such as the Workforce Development Board, the Board of Supervisors, the Health Department, the Employment and Human Services Department, the Redevelopment Agency, public education — including Contra Costa College and the Mt. Diablo Unified School District — and community-based efforts such as North Richmond YouthBuild, Youth Together, and the Bay Area Partnership.