



**NEWS RELEASE**  
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Contact: Joe Valentine, Affiliates Relations Officer  
707-579-4073, ext.12, [jvalentine@sonomacf.org](mailto:jvalentine@sonomacf.org)

**Sonoma Valley Fund’s Youth Initiative Summer Program is a Winner**

August 19, 2011 – Members of the Sonoma Valley Fund, an affiliate of Community Foundation Sonoma County, are thrilled with results from this year’s Youth Initiative Summer Program, designed to help smooth the transition into middle and high school for local students and to provide healthy summer experiences for youths from low-income families.

Children entering both sixth and ninth grades are at pivotal points in their lives, according to Youth Initiative Council executives Ellen LaBruce and Richard Drew. The program has two components with interrelated goals: to jump-start these transitions for “at risk” youth by getting them comfortable with their new school environment before September and to enable kids from economically disadvantaged families to join in summer educational opportunities that engage their minds and bodies in positive ways.

“Over 150 students attended the Enhanced Summer School Program this year,” said La Bruce, “School administrators did an outstanding job attracting the appropriate children and adding experienced teen mentors to the Program’s field trips.” Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Well over two-thirds of the students entering ninth grade and 94 percent of those headed for middle school felt better prepared for school. A significant number from both classes reported being helped with their math and English skills during the Summer Enhancement Program.

The Sonoma Valley Fund’s second summer initiative, the Summer Activity Support Program, enabled 36 children from low-income families to learn to swim, camp, hike, and develop their skills in science and the performing arts. In all, eleven Sonoma Valley youth

programs received a portion of their fees from the Sonoma Valley Fund's Youth Initiative. Says Youth Initiative Council Chair Dick Drew, "Enriching summer activities is increasingly recognized by educators as essential in preventing an academic achievement gap for kids who normally can't afford to participate. We plan to expand this program next year to involve even more youngsters in these summer activities."

Year-end measures of scholastic performance, attendance and behavior for students show that:

- School records of new 6th graders who participated in the 2010 Youth Initiative program showed steady academic improvement across the three trimesters, compared to their grade level peers and to students who were invited but declined to attend.
- The new 9<sup>th</sup> graders who attended the Enhanced Summer Program in 2010 earned more credits toward graduation than those who were eligible but did not attend. These freshmen also did better than students who had attended regular Summer School in 2009. In addition, these 9th graders had the fewest average number of absences of all comparable groups, across both semesters.

The Youth Initiative's programs would not have been possible without generous donations from the community, including the Todd Trust, Leland Foundation, Vadaz Family Foundation, Rotary Club of Sonoma County, Scott Evans Foundation, Jurine Biers, Mike and Mary Schuh, Exchange Bank, Kiwanis Club of Sonoma Plaza, and Sonoma Valley Fund's Board and Advisors.

Sonoma Valley Fund is a resource for donors who wish to make charitable gifts, especially as part of their estate planning, to preserve and enhance the quality of life in Sonoma Valley. Donors may make gifts through a variety of programs custom fit for specific causes, or rely on Sonoma Valley Fund's Board of Directors, who are long-term, active residents of Sonoma Valley.

*Sonoma Valley Fund (SVF) was established in December 2006 as an affiliate of Community Foundation Sonoma County. Its mission is to strengthen our community through philanthropy and legacy giving. SVF created the Youth Initiative to engage young people in*

*upper elementary and middle school grades in positive experiences that will help them succeed in high school and beyond. For more information about the Sonoma Valley Youth Initiative, contact: Dick Drew, Chair, Coordinating Council for Youth Development in Sonoma (707.938.5837), or Ellen LaBruce, Council Executive (707.935.6486). For more information about the Sonoma Valley Fund, please go to [www.sonomavalleyfund.org](http://www.sonomavalleyfund.org).*