

# Key Learnings Report

4<sup>th</sup> Annual Rural  
ACEs Summit

## It Takes a Village:

BUILDING SYSTEMS OF CARE  
THAT CENTER YOUTH & FAMILIES



# Why This Summit Mattered

In December 2025, the [Northern ACEs Collaborative \(NAC\)](#), in partnership with the [Population Health Innovation Lab \(PHIL\)](#), convened rural leaders, youth, practitioners, and state partners to explore how systems can better support children, youth, and families—particularly in rural Northern California.

This summit focused on:

- **Listening to lived experience**, especially youth voices
- **Aligning state and local efforts** across behavioral health, justice, education, and social services
- **Highlighting rural innovations** already working on the ground
- **Moving from insight to action** through concrete offers, requests, and next steps

This brief captures what we learned, what shifted, and what participants committed to doing next.

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# Summit Snapshot

- Nearly **140 attendees** from **17 counties** across Northern California representing the **education, behavioral health, community-based organization, and policy sectors.**
- Attendees reported overwhelmingly that the summit **created meaningful opportunities to connect** with others, and many reported leaving with one or more new relationships they plan to follow up on in the future.
- Summit attendees also reported overwhelmingly that they left **having learned about a new resource, tool, or support** that they are likely to use or further explore.
- The two-day summit included an optional in-person Open Doors training facilitated by the Catalyst Center that **offered tools to support engagement with youth** managing behavioral health or substance use concerns.

**FROM AN ATTENDEE:** "Wonderful work bringing together the community to find ways to meet the unique needs of rural California!"



**FOSTERING CONNECTION:** PHIL's mascot Phin—a sense maker and symbol of curiosity, innovation, and collaboration—was introduced throughout the summit to help connect the dots between message and meaning. PHIL staff pose with Phin as part of the summit welcome (*above*) and activities such as Summit Bingo (*right*) helped attendees engage in programming with play.

### NAC Summit Bingo 'It Takes a Village' Edition

4<sup>th</sup> Annual Rural ACEs Summit

**It Takes a Village:**  
BUILDING SYSTEMS OF CARE THAT CENTER YOUTH & FAMILIES  
NOVEMBER 9 & 10, 2025 • REDWOOD CITY

Mark each square as you experience it throughout the Summit! Get five in a row—across, down, or diagonal—to win a prize or bragging rights. Use this activity to connect, notice, and celebrate what makes our Village strong.

Heard a youth panelist say something that inspired you	Added a sticky note to the Village Map wall	Met someone from a different county	Visited a CYBHI resource partner table	Took a photo with Phin the Fox
Shared what you bring from your village	Learned about a rural innovation	Spoke with someone from a school district	Heard the phrase 'systems of care'	Contributed to a Mentimeter poll
Spotted a mural or visual note being created	Heard a story that gave you hope	Free space!	Added your dot to the State Levers poster	Reflected on what your village needs
Learned a new fact about CalAIM, OYCR, or CYBHI	Thanked a sponsor or presenter	Shared lunch with a new colleague	Noticed something creative on your table	Participated in musical networking
Wrote an intention on a postcard	Heard someone mention 'community voice'	Spoke with a PHIL staff member	Discovered a new resource	Added your idea to the harvest wall

Share your completed card at the NAC Info Table for a small prize or a smile from Phin the Fox!

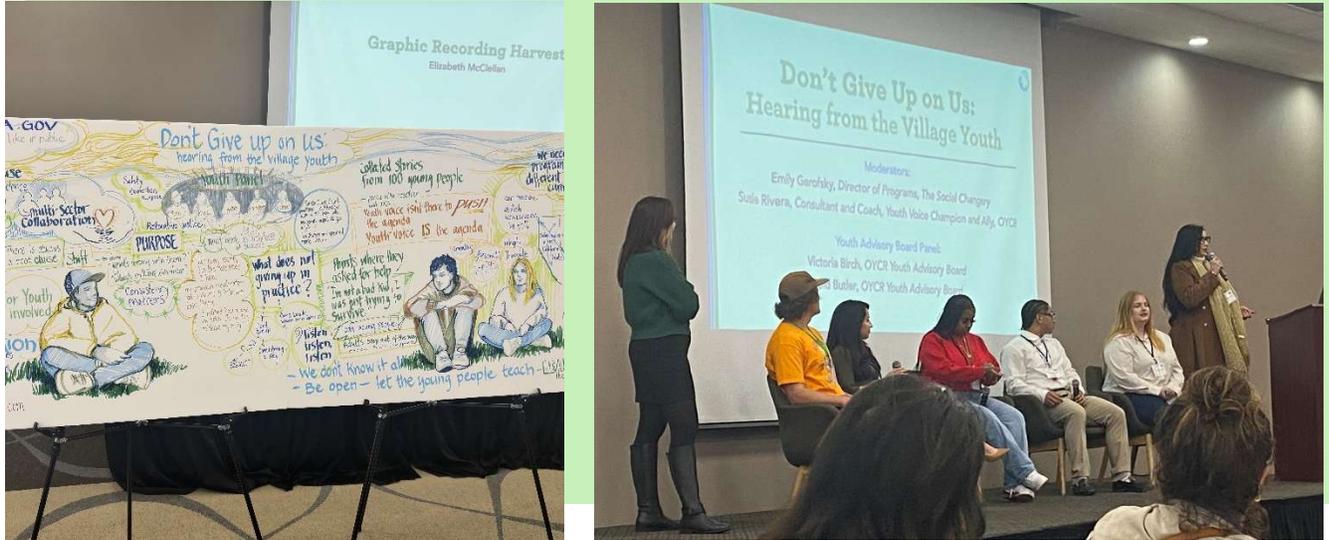
NAC Northern ACEs Collaborative A Rural Resilience Innovation Hub

10 POPULATION HEALTH INNOVATION LAB



# What We Heard: Key Learnings

## Learning #1: Youth Experience Must Shape System Design



(Left) Graphic recording from the “Don’t Give Up on Us” panel featuring members of the CA Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) Youth Advisory Board. (Right) Panel discussion moderated by Emily Gerofsky (left), Director of Programs, The Social Changery and Susie Rivera (right), Consultant & Coach, Youth Voice Champion & Ally, CA Office of Youth and Community Restoration.

- Youth emphasized the importance of **being believed, not blamed**, and of systems that don’t give up on them
- Lived experience **challenged assumptions about “access,”** showing that availability does not equal usability
- Youth insights reframed success as **trust, consistency, and relationships**, not just services

**Key takeaway:** Systems designed for youth without youth will continue to miss the mark.

**WATCH:** This [short film from The Social Changery](#) not only highlights the impact and benefits of restorative justice, but also restores hope, to young people who deserve a second chance, and to communities who want safer, stronger futures.

## Learning #2: Mindset and Relationships Are as Important as Funding



Graphic recording from the Fireside Dialogue, “The Systems Vision Town Hall: Exploring the Vision, Mindset, and Collaborative Leadership Needed to Build Integrated Systems of Care.”

Across sessions, participants named:

- Trust and relationship-building as prerequisites to integration
- The need for shared language across sectors
- The importance of slowing down enough to listen—especially in crisis-driven systems

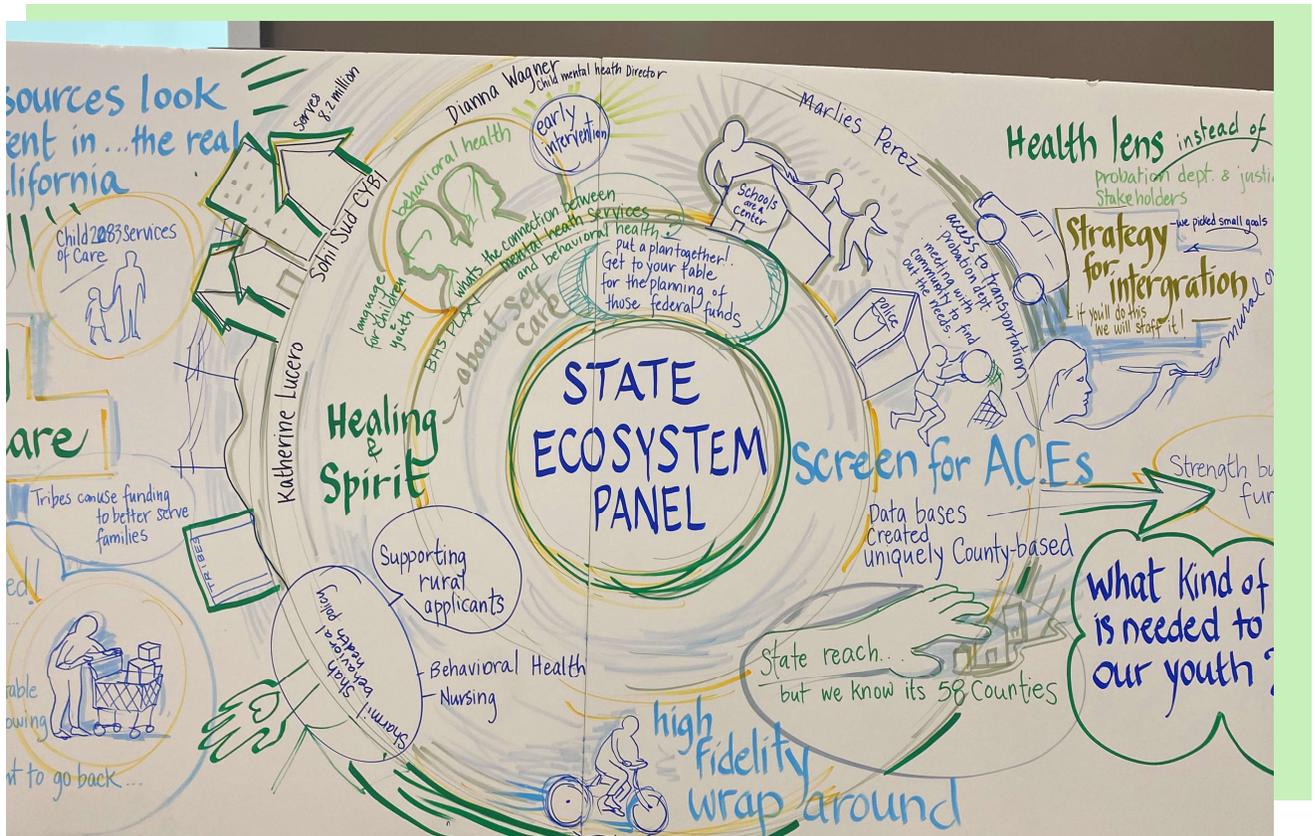
**Key takeaway:** Systems change is not only technical; it is relational.

## Learning #3: Alignment Across State Initiatives Is Both Urgent and Possible

State partners discussed how initiatives intersect at the local level—and where misalignment creates burden.

- Different timelines, reporting requirements, and definitions **create friction**
- Local leaders want **clearer through-lines**, not more programs layered on top

**Key takeaway:** Alignment is less about new structures and more about **shared intent, communication, and practical coordination.**



Graphic recording from State Ecosystem Panel: “The Village Ecosystem: Coordinating Across Statewide Systems.”

## Learning #4: Rural Innovation Is Already Happening—Often Quietly

Participants shared practical, adaptable models such as:

- School-to-behavioral health connector roles such as elementary school wellness coaches
- Culturally affirming mental and wellness programs that empower Native youth and families

**Key takeaway:** Rural communities are not waiting for perfect systems—they are actively building workable ones rooted in their existing community assets.



*The Village Spotlight Session featuring panelists Keoki Burbank (left), Director of Partnerships, Two Feathers Native American Family Services and Matt Reddam (right), School & Community Wellness Advisor, Butte County Office of Education, moderated by Esmeralda Salas of the Population Health Innovation Lab.*

## Actions Identified: From Insight to Practice

During the summit, a board was made available for participants to share their *Requests and Offers*—a simple practice for those in a shared space to make needs visible and invite shared responsibility.

It creates space for people to:

- Clearly **ask for what they need** to move their work forward, and
- Explicitly **offer what they can contribute** to support others

### Requests Named

- Continued spaces for rural peer learning
- Better coordination across funding and reporting requirements
- Support for sustaining relationship-based roles (connectors, coaches, navigators)

### Offers Named

- Sharing tools, templates, and models across counties
- Hosting peer learning conversations
- Connecting partners to CYBHI resources and supports

### What Shifted for Participants

Participants reported:

- Greater clarity about how their work fits into a larger “village”
- New cross-county and cross-sector connections
- Increased confidence that rural voices are shaping statewide conversations
- A shared understanding that no single agency can do this alone

## What Participants Committed to Following the Summit

- Strengthening local cross-sector partnerships (behavioral health, education, justice, CBOs)
- Testing small, practical changes rather than waiting for system-wide reform
- Bringing youth voice into planning and decision-making spaces
- Staying connected through NAC-supported learning and collaboration spaces

## What's Next: How This Work Continues

Following the Summit, NAC and PHIL will:

- Convene the [Rural Resilience Innovation Hub](#), a monthly community of practice designed to deepen learning and support practical application
- Support the **cross-county sharing** of rural innovations
- Continue **elevating youth voices** in systems conversations
- Serve as a **connector between local practice and state-level learning**



**KEY TAKEAWAY:** The summit was not an endpoint—it was a waypoint

## Why This Matters for Funders & Partners

- Investments that support **relationships, coordination, and learning** amplify impact across multiple systems
- Rural communities benefit from **flexible funding** that allows adaptation, not one-size-fits-all solutions
- Supporting backbone and convening roles **helps innovations spread** without overburdening local leaders

## Closing Reflection

This summit reaffirmed that systems of care are strongest when they are built **with communities, not around them**—and when youth and families are treated as partners, not afterthoughts.

## Acknowledgements

### Sponsors

A special thank you to the following for supporting the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Rural ACEs summit:

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## Featured Speakers:

**Keoki Burbank**, Director of Partnerships  
*Two Feathers Native American Family Services*

**Wendy Dickens**, Executive Director  
*First 5 Shasta*

**Elizabeth Estes**, Founder  
*Breaking Barriers*

**Emily Gerofsky**, Director of Programs  
*The Social Changery*

**Sue Grinnell**, Director  
*Population Health Innovation Lab*

**Richard Knecht**, Managing Partner  
*Integrated Human Services Group*

**Michael Lombardo**, Education and Integrated Services Advisor  
*MCL Collaboration*

**Judge Katherine Lucero (ret.)**, Director  
*Office of Youth and Community Restoration*

**Tracie Neal**, Probation Chief  
*Shasta County*

**Marlies Perez**, Division Chief  
*California Department of Health Care Services*

**Matt Reddam**, School and Community Wellness Advisor  
*Butte County Office of Education*

**Susie Rivera**, Consultant & Coach; Youth Voice Champion & Ally  
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**Sharmil Shah**, Branch Chief-Behavioral Health & Policy  
*California Department of Health Care Access and Information*

**Dr. Sohil Sud**, Director  
*Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative*

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*Population Health Innovation Lab*

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*California Department of Social Services*

**Irvin Watkins**, Case Manager  
*North Valley Indian Health*

**Stephanie Weldon**, Deputy Director, Tribal Liaison  
*Office of Health Equity, California Department of Public Health*