

# Networks of Responsibles

*at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities*

*“All citizens should have the opportunity to be active, but all will not respond. Those who do respond carry the burden of our free society. I call them the Responsibles. They exist in every segment of the community – ethnic groups, labor unions, neighborhood associations, businesses – but they rarely form an effective network of responsibility... they must find each other, learn to communicate, and find common ground. Then they can function as the keepers of the long-term agenda.”*

*- John W. Gardner*



## What are Networks of Responsibles?

Networks of Responsibles are informal networks of “trustworthy, steady, fair, and consistent” individuals that share common values and commitments to their community. This phrase, coined by John W. Gardner, was grounded in his belief that strong communities gain much of their stability and ability to adapt to change by having these Networks of Responsibles in place. Through this area of work with the same name, JGC partners with local communities (currently Redwood City and the San Mateo County Mid-Coast) to create conditions and provide supports for Responsibles of all ages to surface and be effective contributors to youth development and community renewal efforts.

## Community Partnerships at the Core of Our Work

A university-based center, JGC is committed to building long-term partnerships with local communities, and in so doing being one of these Responsibles. Through our multiple programs and research initiatives, JGC envisions learning about and actively supporting lasting community change efforts in four key areas:

- Positive outcomes (intellectual, social, emotional and physical) for individuals and groups of youth.
- Healthy and supportive community settings in which youth live and grow.
- Effective and efficient systems in which youth and communities interact.
- A growing and more professionalized field of community youth development that both informs and benefits from the collective action that results from local partnerships.

At the center of all these changes, we believe, is the critical role of these Networks of Responsibles - including youth and adults - in taking the necessary steps to support the development of both healthy young people and their communities.

## Key Strategies

Because each partner community brings a unique set of strengths, needs, and interests to the partnership, the activities we undertake with them vary in order to reflect these distinctive characteristics. JGC applies three cross-cutting strategies in this core area to support the development of these Networks of Responsibles:

1. **Connecting and expanding Networks of Responsibles** by facilitating relationships between and among a broad and representative set of individuals, organizations and coalitions working collaboratively on behalf of youth so that they learn from one another and link their efforts and resources towards common goals.
2. **Contributing youth development knowledge** in the form of research, data analyses, tools and models that are emerging from partner communities and from the broader field of community youth development to inform the decisions and practices of schools, youth organizations and the broader community in support of young people.
3. **Supporting collective action** of these Networks of Responsibles by serving as a co-planner and thinking partner with communities as they work across boundaries to develop comprehensive and sustained policies, practices and programs that enhance the lives of youth and their communities.

## Future Directions

In years to come, JGC looks forward to deepening these strategies and its various JGC initiatives with partner communities as well as growing and testing them with more communities in both San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.



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