

The Collective Healing and Transformation (CHAT) Project

Community Based Restorative Justice Services in Contra Costa County

The Collective Healing and Transformation (CHAT) Project is a community based domestic violence and interpersonal violence (IPV) intervention program.

The CHAT Project is a partnership and works alongside domestic and sexual violence organizations who support underserved populations in Contra Costa and the greater East Bay. Our partnerships reflect our commitment to serving a diverse community, prioritizing racial equity, and centering language access in our work.

Over the past two years, CHAT data shows:

- Over 90% of CHAT participants are BIPOC.
- Almost 50% of CHAT participants receive Medi-Cal, and another 20% receive public assistance (CalWORKS, CalFresh, WIC)
- 60% of CHAT participants live in multi-generational homes
- 50% of survivors served still live in the home with the person who harmed them

An alternative response to violence

When violence occurs, who are the true first responders in our lives? Law enforcement? Crisis lines? This may be true for some people. However, we also know the first place many people seek support is from their **friends, families, coworkers, neighbors, and other support systems**.

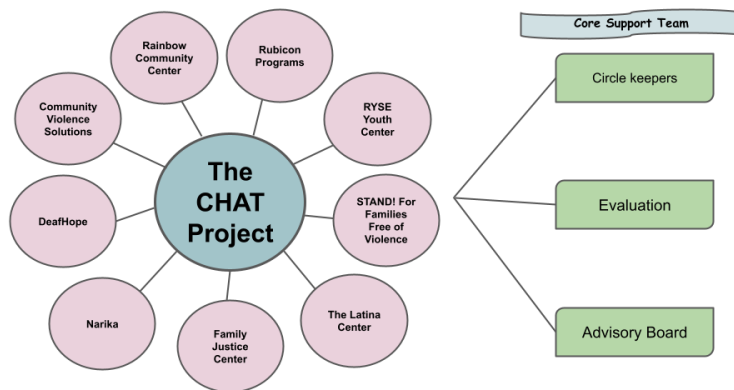
Traditional advocacy responses to domestic and sexual violence have value and also have limitations. Many serve survivors independently, without including their essential support system. Very few, if any, programs provide the possibility for safe and facilitated contact with the person causing harm, *even when they are still living or parenting together*.

Restorative justice is an intervention, healing, and prevention practice. It expands the possibilities of what support for those impacted by interpersonal violence can look like. The CHAT Project uses a whole-family approach to address violence and seeks to engage all people who have been impacted by violence, including children and gives them an opportunity to witness safe communication between trusted adults and caretakers, to have their own voices and concerns be heard, and to learn tools to help them navigate future conflict.

A community based model

The CHAT Project works outside of traditional criminal legal entities to provide a holistic approach to all people impacted by violence. A community based model means participation is:

- **Voluntary** - this is not a mandated diversion program, and CHAT does not accept referrals from criminal legal agencies
- **Confidential** - CHAT will not disclose any information to outside entities or individuals without explicit consent from participants
- **Flexible** - CHAT honors the wisdom of survivors and their families to know what their needs are to address harm and move toward healing
- **Open to all** - CHAT encourages all to participate who are willing, including children, friends, other family members, and those who have caused harm



The CHAT Project's participant outcomes:

- Feelings of an increased level of safety, during and after receiving services
- Feeling supported to reach out and rebuild safe relationships
- Learning new tools to move through future conflict in a safer way
- Feeling empowered and trusted to know what they need to make right the harm that has occurred
- Continuing to use restorative tools and practices at home after CHAT engagement

Measure X Proposal

The CHAT Project encourages the Measure X Community Advisory Board to fund \$750 thousand per year to community based (non-law enforcement) restorative justice programs serving people impacted by domestic, sexual, and family violence.

This funding would provide the needed community wide impact in Contra Costa County and would support:

- More full time restorative justice facilitators
- Training for nonprofit partners and community members
- Language access needs for Contra Costa community members

Restorative justice is transformational. It turns away from the traditional model of state intervention and separation and empowers families to have a say in what healing and accountability could look like.

The CHAT Project has been providing restorative justice services to Contra Costa community members for years and meeting the demand for a safe alternative response to violence. With sustainable county funding, restorative justice could be a resource that all residents in Contra Costa have access to. This is an opportunity for Contra Costa County to lead the way for all of California and nationwide.