

**Strengthening California's Behavioral Health Workforce White Paper:**  
A Case Study on the San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership Project

Jillian Bledsoe, Business Analyst II, SJC-HCS

**September 3, 2025**

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## Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to document and evaluate the San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership Project as a model for addressing California’s behavioral health workforce shortage. By highlighting the initiative’s collaborative approach, measurable outcomes, and potential for statewide replication, this report aims to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners about effective strategies for building a resilient, community-rooted, and sustainable behavioral health workforce across California.

## Scope

This case study examines the development, implementation, and outcomes of the San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership Project. It focuses on the initiative's collaborative framework involving county agencies, educational institutions, and state-funded support programs, and evaluates its effectiveness in addressing workforce shortages through improved clinical placement infrastructure, supervision pathways, and retention strategies.

The report includes both qualitative and quantitative data to assess impact, highlight challenges, and identify lessons learned. While the primary focus is on San Joaquin County, the study also explores the potential for adapting and scaling this model to other counties across California facing similar behavioral health workforce challenges.



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## 1) Executive Summary

California's behavioral health workforce shortage is solvable—and San Joaquin County offers a proven model. Through coordinated placements, expanded supervision, and targeted student support, the partnership reduced vacancies 61–70%, cut clinician caseloads 59%, and converted 81% of interns to hires by Year 2. These results are scalable and can strengthen access and equity statewide.

## 2) Problem Statement

California faces a widening behavioral health workforce gap, most acute in underserved and rural regions. In San Joaquin County, the absence of coordinated clinical placements, limited supervision capacity, and misaligned incentives have constrained recruitment, licensure progression, and retention—directly impacting access and continuity of care.

In response, the San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership Project was launched as a collaborative, locally driven solution. However, as the initiative nears the end of its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding cycle, there is an urgent need to document its successes, extract lessons learned and assess its long-term sustainability and replicability.

## 3) History

Before the launch of the San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership, the county faced persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified behavioral health professionals. San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services was experiencing widespread staffing shortages, limited internship opportunities—available only to existing county employees enrolled in school—and no scholarship support for aspiring professionals. Enrollment in local social work programs remained low, further limiting the workforce pipeline.

Recognizing the need for a strategic, community-rooted solution, the county partnered with HealthForce Partners, a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the health workforce through regional collaboration and equitable access to training. This partnership aimed to address long-standing barriers and build a more sustainable, representative behavioral health workforce across the region.

#### 4) Solution

The San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership Project offers a proven, scalable solution to California’s behavioral health workforce shortage through a locally anchored, multi-stakeholder collaboration. The initiative focuses on building a full-service pipeline from student to licensed professional by addressing key structural barriers in workforce development.

At its core, the solution integrates six strategic components:

- **Internship & Practicum Expansion** - Collaborating with Stanislaus State and University of the Pacific, the project significantly increased local clinical training opportunities, resulting in greater student retention in the region.
- **Supervision Capacity Building** - HealthForce Partners provided intern supervision on behalf of employers increasing placement capacity at both San Joaquin County Behavioral Health and Community Based Organizations, ultimately expanding access to care. Expanded LCSW supervision capacity enables local ASWs to complete licensure requirements within their communities, eliminating the need to relocate for advancement.
- **Targeted Financial Incentives** - Stipends, retention bonuses, and scholarships address immediate financial barriers to participation—proving more effective than traditional student loan repayment programs.
- **Backbone Coordination Model** - HealthForce Partners convenes educational institutions, clinical sites, funders, and county agencies, aligning goals and managing implementation for streamlined impact.
- **‘Grow Our Own’ Strategy** - The initiative prioritizes local talent, upskilling existing residents and current employees through accessible pathways to advanced degrees and licensure.
- **Regional Expansion Planning** - Active discussions with Stanislaus and Merced counties aim to establish a centralized regional clinical placement model, broadening impact and increasing efficiency across the region.

Together, these elements form a comprehensive, community-driven model that not only grows the workforce but does so equitably and sustainably. This solution offers a practical roadmap for other counties—and the state—to replicate and scale for long-term behavioral health system resilience ([See Appendix A](#)).



## 5) Partnership Outcomes

The San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership has yielded measurable and meaningful progress in addressing workforce shortages and expanding access to behavioral health careers. Since its launch, the initiative has led to a **65% reduction in Psychiatric Technician and Mental Health Clinician vacancies** across San Joaquin County, signaling a significant improvement in recruitment and retention ([See Appendix B](#)).

### Key outcomes include:

- A substantial **increase in social work program capacity** across San Joaquin County, strengthening the long-term talent pipeline.
- A **90% increase in internship opportunities**, with **34 paid internships** at BHS provided through HealthForce Partners, all supported by qualified supervision ([See Appendix C](#)).
- An additional **12 community-based organizations** now serve as host sites for interns, expanding hands-on training across diverse care settings ([See Appendix C](#)).
- **Partner organizations** have hosted **interns with supervision stipends**, increasing equitable access to clinical training opportunities.
- Intern-to-hire conversion rates have been strong, with **46% of interns** hired by San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services after their first year and **81% hired after the second year**, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in building a job-ready workforce.
- Caseloads among providers have **decreased** significantly, leading to improved quality and frequency of care, as well as reduced employee turnover. As a result of the partnership, average **caseloads dropped by 59%—from 85 to 35 members per clinician**.
- Financial support has been a cornerstone of the initiative, with a total of **\$820,000 invested in scholarships** across Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Clinical Counselor, and Social Work students—demonstrating a broad commitment across the behavioral health spectrum. An additional **\$20,000 was awarded specifically to Psychiatric Technician students at San Joaquin Delta College** to help cover essential uniform costs ([See Appendix D](#)).
- San Joaquin County Delta College's Psychiatric Technician program enrollment **increased by 70%, growing from 20 to 34 students**—demonstrating the impact of targeted interventions and financial incentives.
- A **retention bonus was awarded to 33 Psychiatric Technicians**, supporting workforce stability in a high-demand field.
- The number of current internships has reached 96, reflecting sustained growth in hands-on training opportunities for future behavioral health professionals.
- **University Impact:** The University of the Pacific social work program quadrupled enrollment over four years, due in part to expanded practicum placements funded by the program. The partnership's ability to provide additional placements in SJ County is key for successful student completion of clinical experience requirements ([See Appendix E](#)).



- **City of Modesto Investment:** Inspired by San Joaquin’s success metrics, Modesto directed local funds to support student stipends and supervision. This early adopter momentum helped expand practicum placements countywide.
- **Expanding Opportunities:** Stanislaus State reinstated its Stockton-based MSW cohort, discontinued several years ago, citing the partnership’s work providing internship placements in San Joaquin County as a key factor—creating new opportunities that directly serve local residents.

These outcomes reflect the power of coordinated, community-based partnerships in building a resilient, diverse, and sustainable behavioral health workforce—one that is better equipped to meet the evolving needs of California's communities.

## 6) Lessons Learned

- **Stipends outperform loan repayment programs:** Students are more receptive to financial support during their education than to post-graduation repayment programs, which are plentiful but underutilized—evident in San Joaquin County's low participation rates.
- **Supervision is a bottleneck:** Expanding supervision capacity for interns and ACSWs is essential to licensure pipeline completion.
- **Backbone coordination matters:** HealthForce Partners’ role in aligning disparate partners, administering program benefits and providing inter supervision was critical to success.
- **Grow-your-own strategies work:** Requiring scholarship recipients to reside in the county helps ensure that interns with local ties remain in and serve their communities.
- **Data-driven approaches can significantly reduce workforce shortages:** The partnership’s targeted focus on high-need classifications resulted in reductions in critical workforce vacancies.

## 7) Call-To-Action

To build on the success of the San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Workforce Partnership, we must take bold, coordinated steps to expand and sustain its impact. This includes:

- **Increasing the availability of practicum placements and qualified supervisors** to ensure students receive the hands-on experience they need to succeed.
- **Expanding student cohorts** by working with educational institutions to increase program capacity and enrollment.
- **Leveraging existing programs and partnerships** to advocate for greater institutional flexibility in accepting more students into behavioral health pathways.
- **Encouraging student commitment to local employment** following their practicum, strengthening the long-term workforce pipeline in San Joaquin County.
- **Expand eligibility for loan repayment support** to include BA level and other qualified providers.
- **Invest in community-based pathways** by prioritizing programs that recruit locally and serve locally.



Based on two years of evidence from the proof of concept, we recommend continued regional collaboration among behavioral health departments. The role of an intermediary partner has proven essential as a convener and catalyst, effectively bridging institutional partners. HealthForce Partners Chief Executive Officer, Paul Lanning states, “Our progress shows what’s possible when educators, employers, and communities work together with a shared purpose. Behind every partnership is a student who can finish their degree, a clinician who chooses to stay and serve locally, and a family who finally receives the care they need.”

With sustained collaboration and investment, this model can be extended across the region. The next step is clear: fund supervision capacity, lock in practicum MOUs, and sustain student supports so counties can replicate these outcomes and secure a resilient, community-rooted behavioral health workforce.



## Stakeholder Testimonials



“Through our partnership with HealthForce Partners, SJCBS has significantly reduced clinician vacancies—from 36 to 14—leading to care for families. By expanding practicum placements and working creatively beyond loan repayment incentives, we've strengthened our pipeline of culturally competent providers and improved faster, more frequent continuity of care in San Joaquin County.”

**Fay Vieira**  
SJC - Interim BHS Director

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“The behavioral health workforce is vital to the health and well-being of our community. San Joaquin County is grateful for the collaboration with HealthForce Partners. This innovative partnership is not simply filling a workforce gap, but also positively impacts accessibility, care opportunities, and health outcomes.”



**Genevieve Valentine**  
SJC - HCS Director

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“One family’s story captures the true impact of this partnership. The husband, once a laborer, completed the SJDC psychiatric technician program and now serves as a long-time SJCBS psych tech, helping patients with acute mental illness reclaim their quality of life. His wife also became a psych tech, then advanced to earn her RN degree at SJDC and also works at a County healthcare facility. Their child followed the same path, graduating from the RN program and serving as an RN in the county. Thanks to the training opportunities at SJCBS, healthcare has become this family’s shared calling and a lasting contribution to the community.”

**Dr. Gerry Hinayon**  
SJDC - Director of Health Services



“CMC is currently fully staffed with behavioral health clinicians as a product of our collaboration with HealthForce Partners. By being fully staffed we were able to provide timely unduplicated services to more than 12,000 individuals in our integrated centers and respond to more than 15,000 calls through our Mobile Community Response Program. This collaboration has assisted us in reinforcing our internal workforce development program by providing funding resources to incentivize internships and clinical supervisors.”



**Alfonso Apu**  
CMC - Chief Behavioral Health Officer



“At Stan State, our mission is to prepare graduates who not only excel in their fields but also uplift the communities they call home. Partnerships like ours with HealthForce Partners are essential to meeting the Central Valley’s urgent healthcare needs. Through scholarships, paid internships, expanded clinical supervision and retention incentives, we are empowering our students — future nurses, social workers, counselors and therapists — to complete their education and step directly into roles that strengthen care and expand access. This is higher education at its best: cultivating local talent to transform health outcomes and create a healthier, hopeful future for all.”

**Britt Rios-Ellis**  
Stanislaus State University - President

“We are incredibly grateful to Healthforce Partners for their ongoing support of our Psychiatric Technician program. Their investment has helped remove barriers for students, leading to higher retention and greater career readiness. Together, we’re not only supporting individual success, we’re building a stronger behavioral health workforce in San Joaquin County. This partnership has made a meaningful difference, with graduates now working in local mental health facilities and giving back to their communities. Looking ahead, we’re excited to continue this collaboration and expand its impact. Partnerships like this are essential for growing a skilled, compassionate workforce that meets the needs of our region.”



**Lisa Lucchesi**  
San Joaquin Delta College - Dean



“I see this collaboration continuing to influence the ability of behavioral health practitioners to obtain employment in the county and cities that they live in, so that they can make positive impacts in their own communities. The partnership has made it possible to have additional clinical interns on site which enables CHS to provide additional services and supports to our STRTP members. We have been able to implement various new group service offerings and provide our youth more safe and supportive adults to engage with.”

**Janae Reinhardt**  
CHS – Clinical Director

“The partnership we hold with San Joaquin County Behavioral Health and HealthForce Partnership has become a cornerstone of support and opportunity for the professional growth of our Master of Social Work (MSW) students at CSU Stanislaus. HealthForce Partners has played a key role in our MSW Practicum Education Program by providing high-quality supervision and increasing access to a diverse range of behavioral health service programs throughout San Joaquin County. Under the guidance of experienced professionals, our students gain hands-on experience and develop critical social work skills in real-world settings throughout behavioral health service programs in San Joaquin County. “



**Nancy Zamora**  
Practicum Ed. Director



“As the collaboration continues to expand, with the support of HFP, our social work department has been able to expand our offering of financial support to students from marginalized and underserved areas, as many of these students are often part of these communities. The representation of behavioral health clinicians coming from the communities they are serving is invaluable. We are excited to continue expanding scholarship opportunities and support for Pacific’s MSW students to deepen health equity and leadership across San Joaquin County. Through the support of HFP, we can continue to shape a community-rooted behavioral health workforce for adults and families in San Joaquin County.”

**Nicoleta Bugnariu**  
University of the Pacific - Dean



## Intern Profiles

Maurice Troy Peoples, Jr. will graduate in December with a master's degree in social work from University of the Pacific, where he also earned his bachelor's degrees in psychology and philosophy. A proud Stockton resident, he is deeply committed to giving back to his community, particularly by supporting youth. As a U.S. Air Force veteran, he also hopes to work with fellow veterans in the future. His passion for helping others led him to social work, a profession he sees as both a calling and a responsibility. "Witnessing the struggles and resilience of people in my community further motivated me," he explains. "I want to be part of the solution and help individuals navigate their circumstances with dignity and hope."



**Maurice Troy Peoples, Jr.**

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Currently in his second trimester of the MSW program at University of the Pacific, Thomas De Guzman is steadily progressing toward his goal of becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in a mental health setting. His career interests lie in psychotherapy and psychiatric inpatient care. Today, he brings his passion and commitment to San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services, where he works as a mental health specialist in both the Crisis Stabilization Unit and the Psychiatric Health Facility. Reflecting on his career shift, Thomas recounts that "working in laboratories for 5 years was a mundane field that I was not excited about. Once I started working for the County, I knew that I found my niche."

**Thomas De Guzman**

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Amaya Armas is a first-year MSW student in the 16-month accelerated program at University of the Pacific. A longtime resident of San Joaquin County, she spent 19 years in Tracy before moving to Stockton four years ago. "I've developed a strong understanding of the community and its unique challenges," she shares. Amaya's goal is to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and serve individuals and families in need.

Amaya chose her internship placements with intention, seeking opportunities that will prepare her for a clinical career. "I want to challenge myself and build strong critical thinking skills," she says. "This internship gives me the chance to apply what I've learned in class to real-world scenarios."



**Amaya Armas**



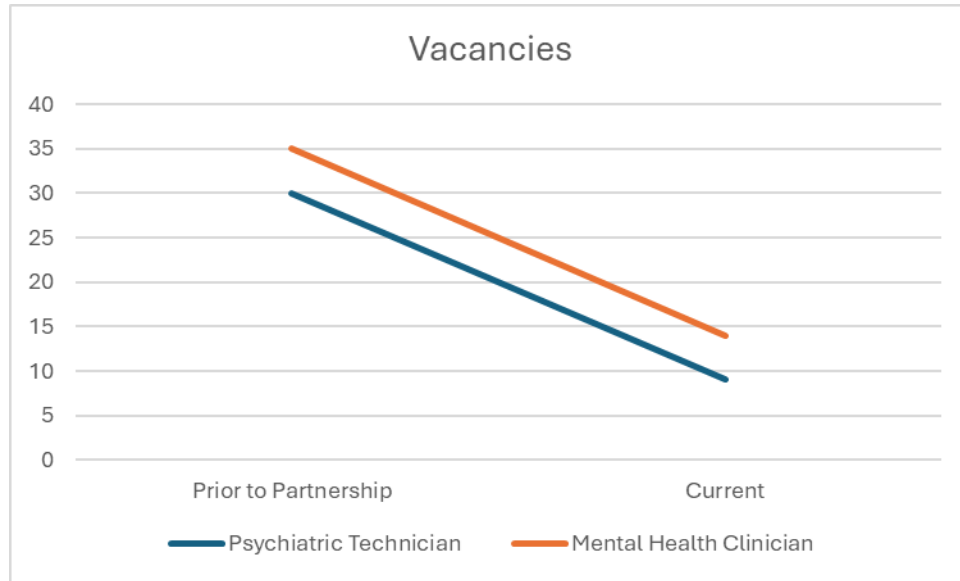
## Appendix A

### Solution Components & Outcomes

- **Internship & Practicum Expansion** → 90% internship growth; 96 active placements; 46%/81% intern-to-hire.
- **Supervision Capacity Building** → Expanded ASW hours completed locally; more host sites (+12); restored Stan State Stockton MSW cohort.
- **Targeted Financial Incentives** → \$820k scholarships; \$20k PT supports; 33 PT retention bonuses.
- **Backbone Coordination (HFP)** → Vacancy reduction 61–70%; caseloads –59%; cross-sector alignment.



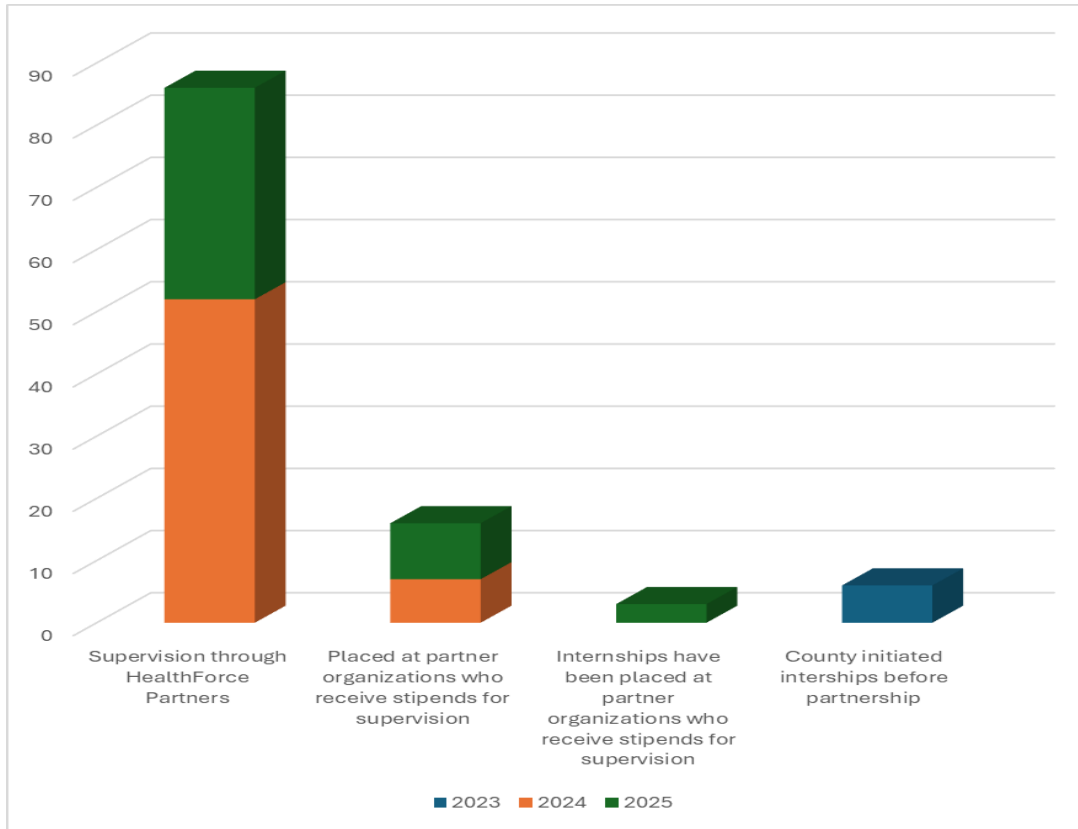
## Appendix B



Mental Health Clinician Vacancy – 61% reduction  
Psychiatric Technician Vacancy – 70% reduction



Appendix C



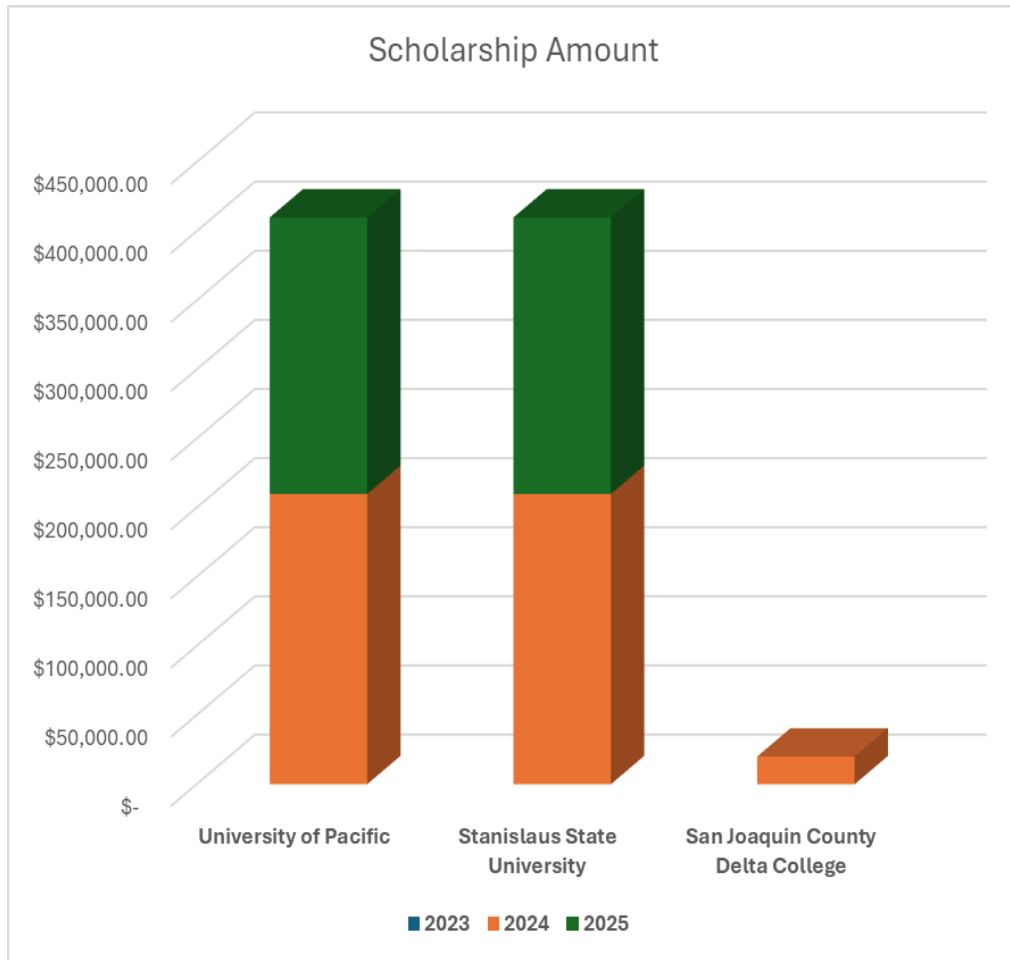
**Intern Locations**

Behavioral Health Services and community-based organizations contracted with Behavioral Health Services and serving medical patients were eligible for interns that served across the county. Many if not most do not have the capacity to accept interns without this program. Below is a list of community-based organizations that have or are currently hosting an intern to date. Interns have served in Stockton, Lodi and Tracy so far.

- Child Abuse Prevention Council
- El Concilio
- Parents By Choice
- Tracy Community Connections Center
- Pride Center
- San Joaquin Pride Center
- Children’s Home of Stockton
- Amelia Ann Adams Whole Life Center
- Community Medical Centers
- Gibson Center
- Sow a Seed Community Foundation
- Hospice of San Joaquin

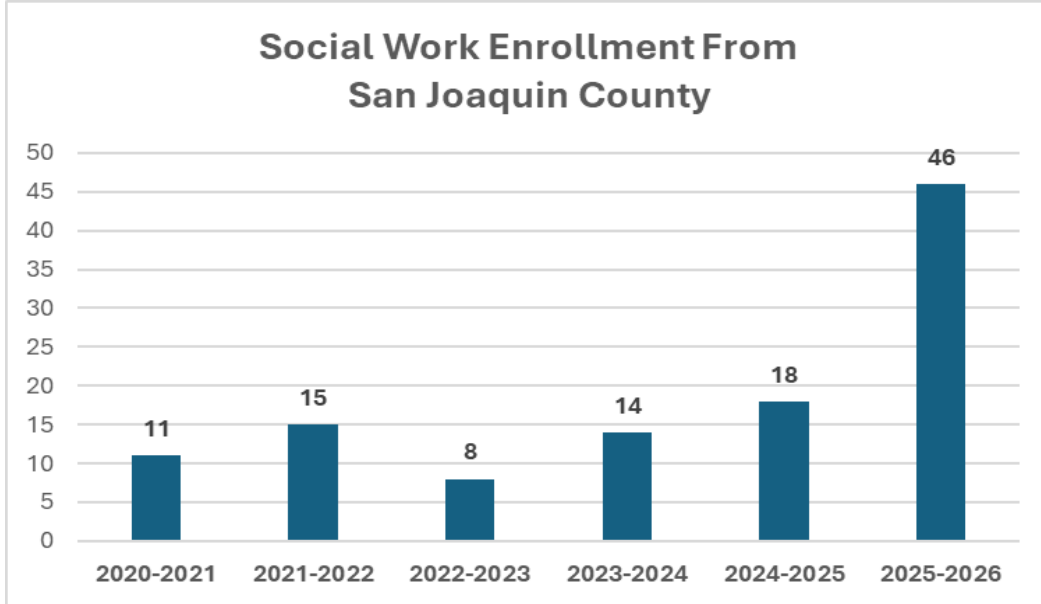


## Appendix D





## Appendix E



*\*University of the Pacific's social work enrollment*