

## **Puente Valley Residents Share Safety Concerns**

On March 8, the Office of Violence Prevention Trauma Prevention Initiative held its first public safety meeting for Puente Valley, which consists of 11 communities and cities, including Bassett, La Puente, North Whittier, Walnut, and West Covina. The virtual meeting attracted nearly 70 participants.

The event was led by three OVP staff members; Ivette Diaz-Quintero, Regional Coordinator, Trauma Prevention Initiative, Patty Hernandez, Community Engagement Coordinator, and Cristina Zuniga, Community Health Worker, First District. The larger group was asked to consider several questions, including community needs that would people feel safer, examples of existing community-driven public safety strategies, and violence prevention activities they would like tried on a wider scale, identifying trusted community organizations.

During the first half of the meeting, OVP's partner for Puente Valley, Soledad Enrichment Action, detailed the street outreach, violence intervention services available to Puente Valley. The area's hospital violence intervention provider, Southern California Crossroads at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Health Center, provided a similar overview.

The second part of the meeting involved a general discussion of the community's public safety and healing needs. Much of the conversation centered on addressing concerns regarding Puente Valley's disproportionately large homeless community, the bulk of whom live in RVs and tents. Many members of this population experience drug addiction and mental health challenges and are both victims and perpetrators of street violence. As with other areas across Los Angeles County, Puente Valley desperately needs an increase in the stock of affordable housing. In addition, gang and gun violence is ever more prevalent.

The group also offered suggestions to improve peace, security, and healing. These included creating community gardens, expanding the Parks After Dark program, establishing sports and amateur leagues for both young people and adults, and providing spaces where people can exhibit their artistic talents.

"Puente Valley expressed a keen interest in holding meetings on a regular basis to discuss in depth the needs, gaps, and areas of opportunity to achieve a violence free L.A. County," said Ivette. She said that a follow-up, in-person meeting for the Puente Valley community is scheduled April 25.