



**UCLA**

Center for  
the Developing  
Adolescent



**2025  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

Scientific Insights. Thriving Adolescents.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Executive Directors.....	1
About the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent.....	2
Meet the Team.....	4
Advancing Adolescent Science, Knowledge, and Research.....	5
Informing Youth Policy and Practice.....	9
Changing the Public Narrative Around Adolescence .....	12
CDA in the News.....	16
Thank You to Our Supporters .....	17

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

### **Dear friends of the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent,**

The publication of our annual report is an exciting opportunity for us to share our efforts and accomplishments from the previous year as we begin working towards new goals in 2026.

This past year alone, our activities included co-authoring an article highlighting insights to inform child welfare systems, briefing state legislators from across the country on developmental considerations relevant to addressing youth homelessness, and supporting two cities on opposite coasts as they work to expand support for adolescents across public systems. We hosted our fourth annual Adolescent Brain Development Symposium, and our second annual STEPS for Youth policy convening in Washington, DC. We released two new briefs, as well as three new STEPS science spotlights.

Yet numbers and highlights alone don't completely capture the impact of our work. The real value of our activities arises from what we do together with the community of policymakers, youth development specialists, funders, educators, and youth-serving professionals who apply the science of adolescent development to positively impact the lives of our young people.

This annual report includes our new theory of change, showing what we strive to achieve, how we aim to do it, and who we connect with to ensure that the people working on behalf of adolescents have the research-informed information they need to help all of our young people build meaningful, purposeful lives.

We recognize that there is a great deal of uncertainty for young people right now. Yet we continue to proceed with great optimism in the future of our communities, our country, and our world because we believe deeply in the promise and opportunity of adolescence. We know that with the right support and resources, our youth are developmentally primed to learn and adapt even amid the rapid changes of the 21st century.

We are already looking forward to a busy 2026, continuing our collective work to ensure a world in which every adolescent has what they need to build their future and contribute to their community.

Sincerely,

**Andrew Fuligni & Adriana Galván**

*Co-Executive Directors*

# About the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent

The UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent (CDA) was founded in 2015 with a goal to make the science of adolescent development useful and accessible to policymakers, youth-serving professionals, parents, and young people themselves, and to advocate for equitable policies, programs, and practices based on that science. We host the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (NSCA), a group of U.S.-based scientists with broad expertise who work to integrate and disseminate scientific knowledge about adolescent development to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. We also host the Youth Scientific Council on Adolescence (YSCA), a group of young people who work with CDA staff and the NSCA to inform and communicate the science of adolescence to broader audiences.

## Our Mission

We promote the integration of developmental science into policies, practices, and public discourse and advance a shared commitment to creating the conditions that support adolescents.

## Our Vision

We work toward a future in which every adolescent has what they need to build their future and contribute to their community.



# Theory of Change

### Who We Work With

- Decision Makers** involved in policies, programs, and public systems
- Traditional media reporters and other public influencers**
- Public and private funders**
- Adolescent-focused scholars**
- Organizers who connect** those working to support adolescents



### What We Do

- Identify, review, and explain** research about adolescent development
- Track** emerging issues affecting adolescents
- Create and share content and learning experiences** with those working to support youth
- Cultivate trusting relationships** with youth-focused organizations and leaders
- Provide information to adolescent-focused scholars** about using science in policy and practice
- Promote a more accurate, science-based narrative** about adolescence
- Advise and participate** in efforts to advance policy and practice that support adolescents
- Help youth understand and communicate** the science of adolescence



### What Change We Want to See

#### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- Archive of **research into adolescent development and interventions**
- Regularly refined **set of policy and practice areas** for applying the science
- Accurate, engaging, accessible **content** for our key audiences
- Tools and events** that support connection, collaboration, and the use of research insights by our audiences
- Cooperative relationships with organizations and leaders** working to support young people

#### LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Decision-makers apply insights from developmental science** to their policies, programs, and practices
- Funders prioritize and increase funding for adolescent development** in their work
- The media and others who communicate about youth have ready access** to the science of adolescent development
- Adolescence is widely understood as a period of critical learning and development** when science-informed investment can support positive futures for adolescents and their communities

## MEET THE TEAM



**Andrew Fuglini, PhD**  
Co-Executive Director



**Adriana Galván, PhD**  
Co-Executive Director



**Elise Brumbach, JD, MPP**  
Policy & Practice Director



**Meghan Lynch Forder, MA**  
Communications Director



**Ann Nguyen**  
Administrator



**Megan Rouse**  
Communications &  
Marketing Associate



**Natalie Saragosa-Harris, PhD**  
Research Associate



**Ava Trimble**  
YSCA Facilitator

### STAFF HIGHLIGHT: Taylor Colby, MPH - Policy and Practice Associate



This year, we expanded our team and welcomed Taylor Colby, CDA's new policy and practice associate! Taylor will work closely with our policy director to oversee CDA's comprehensive policy network of key stakeholders and collaborators focused on adolescent development. In this role, she will conduct policy research, amplify findings to relevant audiences, and lead the development of state-focused policy briefs and related materials on issues affecting adolescents.

TO CONTACT ANY OF THE STAFF ABOVE, PLEASE EMAIL [CDA@PSYCH.UCLA.EDU](mailto:CDA@PSYCH.UCLA.EDU).

## ADVISORY BOARD

**Ron Dahl, MD**  
**Chair of the Advisory Board**  
Director of the Institute of Human Development and Professor in the Community Health Sciences and Joint Medical Program, UC Berkeley  
Founding Director, UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent

**Margarita Alegría, PhD**  
Chief of the Disparities Research Unit, Mongan Institute at Massachusetts General Hospital  
Chair, The Harry G. Lehnert, Jr. and Lucille F. Cyr Lehnert Endowed MGH Research Institute  
Professor in the Departments of Medicine and Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

**Karen Pittman, MA**  
Founding Partner, Knowledge to Power Catalysts  
**Chris Plutte**  
Managing Director, Bezos Family Foundation  
**Zoë Stemm-Calderon, EdLD**  
Executive Director, Raikes Foundation's Youth Serving Systems



# Advancing Adolescent Science, Knowledge, and Research

**2,600+**

ATTENDEES OF CDA LECTURES AND EVENTS

**24**

NSCA AND YSCA MEMBERS

**40,000+**

NEW WEBSITE USERS IN 2025

To make the science of adolescent brain and social development relevant and accessible to those working to support adolescents, we convene researchers at events, compile insights from the science of adolescence, and curate new research for our scientific and professional communities to support broad audiences.

“CDA's commitment to studying adolescence fundamentally shifts how society thinks about young people and who we are becoming as humans. It reframes adolescence as this extremely formative stage of life.”

—BRYNN SANTOS, 2025 YSCA MEMBER AND 2025 BOOTCAMP PARTICIPANT

## Meet the National Scientific Council on Adolescence

CDA is proud to host the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (NSCA), a group of U.S.-based scientists with a broad range of expertise in adolescent development who work to integrate and disseminate accurate scientific knowledge about adolescent development to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.

### Co-Directors

**Leslie Leve, PhD**  
University of Oregon

**Jennifer Pfeifer, PhD**  
University of Oregon

### 2025 Members

**Rhonda Boyd, PhD**  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
University of Pennsylvania

**Anthony Burrow, PhD**  
Cornell University

**Ron Dahl, MD**  
University of California, Berkeley

**Andrew Fuligni, PhD**  
University of California,  
Los Angeles

**Adriana Galván, PhD**  
University of California, Los Angeles

**Allyson Mackey, PhD**  
University of Pennsylvania

**Jacqueline Nesi, PhD**  
Brown University

**Candice Odgers, PhD**  
University of California, Irvine

**Stephen Russell, PhD**  
University of Texas at Austin

**Linda Wilbrecht, PhD**  
University of California, Berkeley

**Joanna Lee Williams, PhD, MSEd**  
Search Institute

**Carol Worthman, PhD**  
Emory University

## FEATURED HIGHLIGHTS

### 16 TO 25: BUILDING PATHWAYS TOWARD A THRIVING ADULTHOOD

As part of our new multi-year initiative to share insights from developmental science relevant to supporting economic agency among young people as they enter adulthood, we created a research-based overview of later adolescence, the ages between 16 and 25, which offers suggestions to support key developmental needs during this stage of development.

[READ THE RESOURCE →](#)

### SUPPORTING HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENTS FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

In this resource, we provide information about the unique characteristics, experiences, and developmental needs of adolescents from immigrant families, and provide research-based recommendations on how to best support this population of youth.

[READ THE RESOURCE →](#)

### 2025 ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

Our fourth annual Adolescent Brain Development Symposium convened policymakers, youth-serving organizations, young people, and researchers to discuss how we can leverage developmental science towards 'Building Economic Opportunity during Adolescence.' At this event, we hosted a series of moderated conversations on how an understanding of late adolescent development can help us support career preparation, economic investments, and entrepreneurship as young people transition into adulthood.

[WATCH EVENT SESSIONS →](#)



## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



### SPRING RESEARCH ROUNDUP

This roundup provides an overview of studies into adolescent development, highlighting the role of family relationships, sleep, adverse childhood experiences, and neighborhood characteristics in brain development and mental health.

[READ THE ROUNDUP →](#)



### SUMMER RESEARCH ROUNDUP

In this roundup, we dive into research on adolescent development, including how neighborhoods affect sleep, the link between prosocial behavior and school performance, the role of location in racial discrimination, and the impact of specific types of adversity on brain development.

[READ THE ROUNDUP →](#)



### FALL RESEARCH ROUNDUP

This roundup highlights studies that showcase the importance of adaptive risk taking, how close relationships with parents can support mental health, how practitioners can best support LGBTQ+ youth, and how early support in high school can promote positive outcomes later in life.

[READ THE ROUNDUP →](#)

## New Fact Sheets



### 5 FAST FACTS ABOUT PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS DURING ADOLESCENCE

Friendships gain new importance and power as we become adolescents. Healthy peer connections can lead to higher academic achievement, fewer delinquent and risky behaviors, and greater overall well-being. This fact sheet provides research-based information about the importance and impact of friendships and peer relationships during adolescence.

[READ THE FACT SHEET →](#)



### FAST FACTS ABOUT SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS FIVE YEARS AFTER COVID

In 2020, COVID disrupted nearly every aspect of education, work, and social connections. Students who were in the earliest years of their education when schools first closed due to the pandemic are now in middle school—they are in early adolescence, at a pivotal stage in development for shaping mental health and positive outcomes, even after earlier adversity. In this resource, we provide fast facts about how the COVID pandemic impacted youth and why early adolescence is an opportunity to shape positive trajectories for young people even after earlier challenges.

[READ THE FACT SHEET →](#)



# Informing Youth Policy and Practice

**450+**

YOUTH-FACING JUDGES AND LEGAL PROFESSIONALS TRAINED ON THE CORE SCIENCE OF ADOLESCENCE

**40+**

STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATORS BRIEFED

**125+**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND POLICYMAKERS EQUIPPED TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

To have wide-reaching impacts on all young people, CDA works to inform local, state, and federal policies and programs that affect youth where they are: in families, schools, workplaces, and our communities. We do this by briefing legislators, agencies, and national organizations; curating the science of adolescence for policy and practice settings; and hosting cross-sector events that encourage dialogue on using developmental science to effectively support young people.

**“The UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent is an indispensable partner in our work to transform youth-serving systems, especially foster care and juvenile justice, so they reflect the extraordinary promise of adolescence. Their leadership makes it possible for policymakers and practitioners to design supports that honor young people’s strengths and their immense capacity for change.”**

—JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YOUTH LAW CENTER

### FEATURED HIGHLIGHT

#### New Resources from STEPS for Youth

This year, we added new resources to our **STEPS for Youth** (Science To Enhance Policy Success) online platform. STEPS For Youth provides policymakers, youth-serving organizations, and practitioners with resources that contain actionable insights from developmental science to help them apply research-based approaches to their policy and practice work.

##### STEPS SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT: PROVIDING STABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD SUPPORTS ADOLESCENTS' BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

This spotlight explains the unique consequences to health and development that result from food insecurity during adolescence, and offers suggestions for using insights from the science of adolescent development to help ensure that young people get the reliable nutrition their developing bodies and minds need.

[READ THE SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT →](#)

##### STEPS SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT: DEVELOPING A POSITIVE RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY DURING ADOLESCENCE CAN SUPPORT HEALTHY MENTAL AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

This spotlight provides insights into how creating a positive sense of self and belonging during adolescence, which includes growing our identity as part of a particular racial as well as ethnic group, can support healthy development.

[READ THE SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT →](#)



### EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



#### STEPS FOR YOUTH POLICY CONVENING

In October, we held our second annual STEPS for Youth (Science to Enhance Policy Success) event in Washington, DC. This year, policymakers, youth-serving organizations, and practitioners convened to discuss how to support this new cohort of middle school students, who were kindergarteners when the pandemic closed schools five years ago. Insights from the conversation and research discussed at the event elicited a new STEPS science spotlight, “Research Insights to Support Adolescents Five Years Post-Pandemic.”

[READ THE SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT →](#)



#### BEYOND THE BENCH

Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván and Communications Director Meghan Forder were each invited to speak at Beyond the Bench, a multidisciplinary conference convening professionals who serve children, youth, and families in the California court system. Adriana gave the opening plenary, “The Adolescent Brain: Insights from Neuroscience and Implications for Juvenile Courts,” and Meghan presented on a panel, “Connecting with Young Minds: Understanding Emerging Adults and Young Adult Courts.”

[READ MORE →](#)



#### MAKING (BRAIN) WAVES: CONNECTING ADOLESCENT BRAIN SCIENCE WITH EDUCATION POLICY & PRACTICE IN PHILADELPHIA

This cross-sector event was hosted by the Philadelphia Learning Collaborative and convened elected officials, community-based organizations, teachers, principals, the School District of Philadelphia’s Superintendent and Board of Education, representatives from higher education, and more. During this three-day training, Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni and NSCA member Joanna Williams presented the science of adolescence to attendees to promote the integration of developmental science in policy and classroom practice in the city of Philadelphia.

[READ MORE →](#)



#### SUPPORTING THE CONNECTING BRAIN DURING ADOLESCENCE: INSIGHTS TO SERVE YOUTH IN LONG BEACH

The City of Long Beach invited CDA to deliver a training on adolescent development to all youth-facing employees across city departments and agencies. During the training, Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni shared insights from the science of adolescent development to promote consideration for how these employees can equitably support the developmental needs of the city’s nearly 90,000 adolescents.

### Consensus Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Policy and Practice for Adolescents in Foster Care

Through a project convened and led by the Youth Law Center, Co-Executive Directors Adriana Galván and Andrew Fuligni co-authored a consensus report with other notable research experts that identifies how developmental science can inform positive change in the foster care system.

[READ THE REPORT →](#)



# Changing the Public Narrative Around Adolescence

CDA continues to share the science of adolescent development to build a more accurate understanding of this stage of life. We strive in all of our communications to correct misconceptions about adolescence and highlight the remarkable growth, learning, and connection that make these years a critical period of opportunity for supporting and investing in young people.

**5,400+**

ADAPTIVITY PODCAST DOWNLOADS IN 2025

**1.3M+**

VIEWS ON CDA AND CDA-SUPPORTED VIDEOS PUBLISHED IN 2025

**2,000+**

MONTHLY EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

**“**The YSCA makes a difference by prompting information about youth through the perspective of youth. Our experiences and points of view give way for more meaningful discussion. From the YSCA, I have learned that science is useless when it can't be understood by those meant to benefit from it. **”**

—BENJAMIN OLANIYI, 2025 YSCA MEMBER



## FEATURED HIGHLIGHT

### TED-Ed Videos

In partnership with the Bezos Family Foundation, the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent worked with TED-Ed to create videos backed by the science of adolescence. **Learn more about risk taking, rewards, and skill building during adolescence with these 2025 TED-Ed videos:**



Would you eat a ghost pepper for a prize?

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)



The clever trick used by sports betting apps

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)



5 signs you're a good driver

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)

## CDA Blog

This year, we published monthly blog posts that expanded on topics ranging from climate action to early adolescence to social media.

[EXPLORE OUR BLOG →](#)



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH

[READ MORE →](#)



HOW THE SCIENCE OF CONTRIBUTION CAN INFORM COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

[READ MORE →](#)



THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING AND INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT FOOD SECURITY

[READ MORE →](#)

### Adaptivity Podcast

This year, the *Adaptivity: The Science of Adolescence* podcast produced six episodes exploring topics that impact adolescents.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA AND ADOLESCENTS, PART 1

In a two-part episode, Ron Dahl, the host of *Adaptivity* and CDA's founding director, examines the research about youth and social media. In part 1, former Youth Scientific Council members Dallas Tanner and Becker Chabaan give their perspective on digital media and explain how they navigate its benefits and risks.

[LISTEN NOW →](#)

#### SOCIAL MEDIA AND ADOLESCENTS, PART 2

In part 2, Ron talks with researchers Nick Allen and Jacqueline Nesi about how developmental science can help us create social media and other technology that could not only decrease risks but also amplify new opportunities created by the digital world.

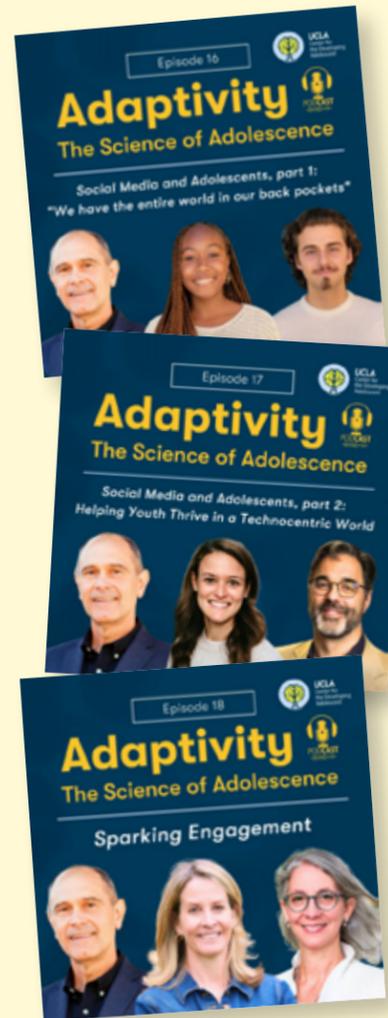
[LISTEN NOW →](#)

#### SPARKING ENGAGEMENT

In an episode focused on how we can ensure that new technologies support healthy engagement, learning, and social development instead of hijacking youth engagement for profit, Ron speaks with Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, authors of *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*.

[LISTEN NOW →](#)

Episodes developed by members of our Youth Scientific Council on Adolescence were featured via the "Our Youth's Perspective" mini-series. Find all podcast episodes on [Spotify](#), [iTunes](#), and [Libsyn](#)!



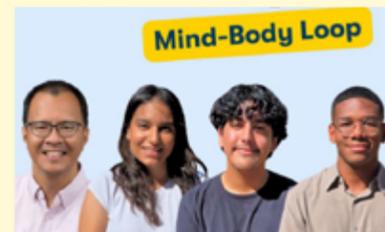
#### AI & PUBLIC POLICY

[LISTEN NOW →](#)



#### NATURE V. NURTURE

[LISTEN NOW →](#)



#### THE MIND-BODY LOOP

[LISTEN NOW →](#)

### EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

#### Annual Summer Research Boot Camp in Adolescent Development

Each year, the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent supports the Annual Summer Research Boot Camp in Adolescent Development, led by UCLA professor of education Sandra Graham and CDA's Co-Executive director Andrew Fuligni.

At the boot camp, local high school students learn about adolescent brain development, developmental science, and explore topics like sleep, friendship, and diversity.

Read more from the students themselves about what they learned at the 2025 boot camp in the following blog posts:



#### EXPLORING THE REMARKABLE ADOLESCENT BRAIN AS AN ADOLESCENT

[READ MORE →](#)



#### INSIDE THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN: THE IMPACT OF FRIENDSHIPS AND DIVERSITY

[READ MORE →](#)



#### USING SCIENCE AND REJECTING STEREOTYPES TO IMPROVE ADOLESCENT SLEEP

[READ MORE →](#)



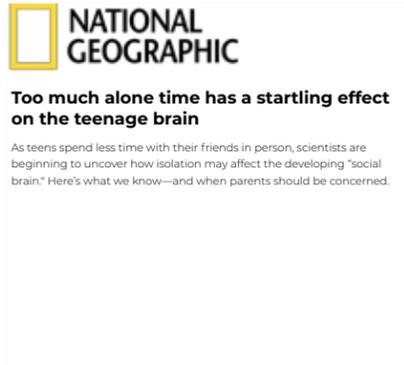
### Meet the Youth Scientific Council on Adolescence

Maya Bachi  
Alexander Binafard  
Ananshaa Singh  
Brooklyn Smith  
Danari Golden

Jeevana Doddi  
Kevin Ramirez  
Layah Belay  
Odalis Hernandez  
Yonathan Kiflezghie



## CDA IN THE NEWS



**“TOO MUCH ALONE TIME HAS A STARTLING EFFECT ON THE TEENAGE BRAIN,” NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC**  
Quoting Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván

[READ THE ARTICLE →](#)



**“THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION IS TOUGH. HOW EDUCATORS CAN HELP,” EDUCATION WEEK**  
Quoting NSCA members Rhonda Boyd and Joanna Williams from our November media briefing on supporting the new cohort of middle school students five years after the COVID pandemic

[READ THE ARTICLE →](#)



**“SLEEP TRAINING IS NO LONGER JUST FOR BABIES. SOME SCHOOLS ARE TEACHING TEENS HOW TO SLEEP,” ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
Quoting Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni

[READ THE ARTICLE →](#)



**“TEENS TAKE RISKS. WE SHOULD BE HAPPY THEY DO,” BRAIN FACTS**  
Quoting Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván

[READ THE ARTICLE →](#)



**“WHAT ANIMALS CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A TEEN,” SCIENCE**  
Quoting CDA Founding Director Ron Dahl

[READ THE ARTICLE →](#)

## Thank You to Our Supporters

The UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent is generously supported by the **Bezos Family Foundation**, the **Annie E. Casey Foundation**, **Spring Point Partners**, and the **Stuart Foundation**. Major funding is also provided by the **Funders for Adolescent Science Translation (FAST)**, a consortium that includes the **Annie E. Casey Foundation**, the **Bezos Family Foundation**, the **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**, **Hopelab**, **Pivotal Ventures**, **Spring Point Partners**, the **Stuart Foundation**, and **Raikes Foundation**.

Thank you to our supporters and funders for helping us advance equity in adolescent growth and development. Our work would not be possible without you.

If you are interested in helping fund our work, please contact **Ann Nguyen** at [annnguyen@ucla.edu](mailto:annnguyen@ucla.edu).

**“Translating the science of adolescence for system leaders, decision-makers, and frontline practitioners is a vital step in reimagining and strengthening youth-engaging systems. The Center for the Developing Adolescent has been a key partner in this work of translation and reimagination.”**

**—ANDY KUCER, SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER FOR THE HIVE, SPRING POINT PARTNERS**





**UCLA**

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the Developing  
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[DEVELOPINGADOLESCENT.ORG](http://DEVELOPINGADOLESCENT.ORG)

