

Data supports the saying



**it takes a
village**

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"It takes a village to raise a child." Generally attributed as an African proverb, the adage, according to Wikipedia, could have evolved from a regional saying that translates to "a child does not grow up only in a single home" or another that advises that a child's upbringing belongs to the community. No matter what its roots are, it serves as shorthand for current social science and health research. Indeed, it does take committed villagers to raise children well. "It takes a village to raise a child" is a guiding principle in my life and an unofficial slogan of the Carpinteria Children's Project.

"Children are only as strong as the families in which they live, and families are only as strong as the communities in which they reside. Therefore to truly affect the child, we must address the surrounding factors that influence a child's ability to thrive." These wise words were

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Christakis and James Fowler, analyzed data that had been collected on folks in Framingham, Mass., for a study of risk factors for heart disease. Since the original researchers wanted to track study participants for years, they asked participants to list their close social connections, the family members and friends who would know where they would be in the future.

Christakis and Fowler used that data about social connections and the health data and found some pretty interesting patterns. If a participant became obese, his or her close friends and family were 57 percent more likely to also become obese. Even more surprising, a participant was 20 percent more likely to become obese

written by Carpinterian Michelle Robertson. Our beautiful parks, healthy schools, and organizations including service clubs, the Boys & Girls Club, Girls Inc. and the Carpinteria Children's Project are undoubtedly part of the village that promotes our children's ability to thrive. These community resources both support children directly and allow parents to work, learn, and take care of themselves so they can be strong families.

It takes a village to raise a child and to keep the adults healthy and flourishing. We villagers are more interconnected than we may realize. The people around us—and not just those we see daily—have an influence on us, and we have an influence on them. Two researchers, Nicholas

if the friends of a friend became obese—even if the connecting friend didn't gain weight. Whoa.

Researchers found that smoking, drinking, happiness and loneliness appeared to spread across social groups in similar ways. For example, results suggest that if your friend takes up smoking, you are 36 percent more likely to take up smoking yourself. The effects stretched three links before they faded out; in other words, my behavior could be influenced by my sister's friend's friend. And I have to think twice to remember my sister's friend's name!

"Even as we are being influenced by others, we can influence others. And therefore the importance of taking actions that are beneficial to others is heightened," Christakis was quoted as saying in a *New York Times Magazine* article. Let's continue to do and celebrate the incredible work our village does to support children and adults while thinking in new ways about what we as individuals can do to strengthen our families and community. We know that simple actions we take make a difference. The person you share a smile with is likely to pass on that smile to their connections. I bet that child you know would brighten a bit if you asked her to tell you something she's learned at school or what she is looking forward to doing over winter break. We are all her village—we are all villagers together—and we all deserve to be proud that she is thriving!

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