Since 2010, The California Endowment (TCE) has invested in youth leadership and youth-led organizing groups as a key component of its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. These youth groups have sought to support the healthy development of their members while engaging them in efforts to promote their communities’ well-being. As part of a longitudinal evaluation, this report focuses on BHC-affiliated youth programming in Boyle Heights. Located in Southern California, Boyle Heights is one of 14 BHC sites.

This report draws on survey data collected from the core youth members of nine organizations that engage their members in grassroots organizing and advocacy, media production and the cultural arts, practices that promote healing and well-being, and other activities. These groups include: Boyle Heights Beat, Genders and Sexualities Alliance, HealthCorps, InnerCity Struggle, Jovenes Inc., Labor Community Strategy Center, Las Fotos Project, Latino Equality Alliance, and Weingart East Los Angeles YMCA. A number of these groups are featured in a 2014 report on BHC-affiliated youth programming in Boyle Heights.

This report contains four main sections. First, we begin by providing a demographic profile of core youth leaders in BHC-affiliated groups. Second, we describe why and how youth came to participate in their BHC group. Building on earlier evidence from this evaluation, we then present self-reports of how youth acquire a range of civic and educational skills and experiences, while also enhancing their own well-being. Lastly, we conclude by briefly summarizing interviews with key stakeholders to show how BHC-affiliated youth organizations have collectively engaged their youth members in addressing health, safety, educational, and other school and community concerns. In sum, this report provides further documentation of youth leadership efforts just past the midpoint of the 10 year BHC initiative.
DESCRIPTION OF BHC YOUTH PROGRAM REGULAR PARTICIPANTS

This study draws on 122 surveys collected from young people who regularly participate in BHC youth programs in Boyle Heights. Survey participants represent 99% of core youth members in organizations that participated in the study. The average age of these members at the time of the survey was 17.5, but they ranged in age from 14 to 25 years old. Young women outnumbered young men, as shown in Figure 1. A small percentage of participants (4%) did not identify along the gender binary.

Participants were generally representative of the racial/ethnic composition of the Boyle Heights community. Ninety-three identified as Latino/a, 5% identified as African-American, 2% identified as White, and less than 1% identified as Asian-Pacific Islander. Most youth came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 87% were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school. Only 7% were raised by a parent with a bachelor’s degree.

MEMBERS’ INVOLVEMENT

Youth in Boyle Heights vary in how long they had been involved in their organizations. Quite notably, most — 80% — had been involved in their BHC-affiliated organization for at least a year. This suggests that overall, BHC organizations were able to retain many youth, offering them extended opportunities to develop their leadership capacity over time. Of the remaining youth, 6% had been involved 6-11 months and 12% were involved for less than 6 months. A small number did not specify how long they had been involved in their organization.

Youth were asked to list up to three reasons they joined their BHC-affiliated youth organization. As shown in Figure 2, most respondents (57%) were drawn to the group because the group seemed like fun. Forty-three percent joined because they liked what the group focused on,
indicating that youth shared concerns for advancing interests in their communities. Other frequently reported reasons for joining a BHC organization included being invited by friends (41%), wanting to develop skills (28%), and wanting to make a difference (25%).

![Figure 2. Reason for joining BHC group](image)

Youth in BHC-affiliated youth organizations were asked to report the types of activities that they engaged in as part of their BHC group. The list was based on common activities reported by BHC staff in an earlier survey. As shown in Figure 3, Boyle Heights youth most commonly claimed to have participated in college preparation and success (66%). Youth also participated in other types of activities that evidence their engagement in community affairs. Notably, 57% of youth reported making a public presentation, and 54% participated in a march, action, or rally. Additionally, 49% of youth made important decisions within their group, 48% planned a meeting or event, and 31% wrote about issues impacting their communities. Some youth also collected signatures or canvassed for a campaign (30%), met with elected officials (25%), and/or engaged in voter education (20%).

BHC-affiliated organizations also contributed to youths’ wellbeing. Forty-three percent participated in healing activities and 28% participated in physical exercise. Additionally, 20% facilitated a restorative justice circle. Quite notably, youth in Boyle Heights were often connected to broader statewide or regional efforts, as 39% participated in Building Healthy Communities activities outside of their communities.
HOW YOUTH BENEFIT FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT

As demonstrated in earlier phases of the BHC youth program evaluation, BHC youth organizations contribute to their members’ healthy development in a variety of ways and to different degrees. In the survey, we asked members to rate the degree to which their group involvement impacted different aspects of their personal development—did it have no impact, very little impact, some impact, or a lot of impact? Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents who reported that their organizational involvement had “a lot” of impact on each of the areas of personal development included in the survey.

Survey findings suggest that members felt particularly empowered around learning how to stand up for their beliefs, as 77% reported that they benefited “a lot” in this case. Three-fourths also improved their ability to communicate with others by a lot. Additionally, youth reported that they learned about health issues that impact their community (72%). Participation also made a lot of impact on most youths’ ability to build or strengthen relationships with mentors (70%) and their ability to speak in public (61%). The majority also developed their capacity to impact policy change, as well as organize others to participate in campaigns that benefit their communities.

Youth frequently learned about their own cultural and racial backgrounds and the diversity of the California population. As results show, 64% reported learning about their own culture or ethnic/racial group, while 54% learned about other ethnic/racial groups. Additionally, 54% learned a lot about LGBTQ issues and 52% learned a lot about economic inequality.
Participation also had implications for members’ health and educational outcomes. While 48% percent of youth reported taking a lot better care of their emotional well-being, 36% percent claimed to have taken a lot better care of their physical health. At the same time, over half learned a lot about college and career options, and around a third significantly improved their grades in school.

**Figure 4. The degree to which BHC impacts its members: Percent responding “a lot”**

**COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**

In addition to supporting the healthy development of members, most BHC-affiliated youth organizations collectively made a positive impact at the community and state level. Their efforts included the following:

- **Equitable School Funding**: In collaboration with South Los Angeles organizations, Boyle Heights groups sought proper implementation of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) ‘Equity is Justice’ Resolution. Passed in June 2014 as a result of youth and community organizing efforts, this resolution guides expenditures of supplemental state funding made available through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Funds aim to support the academic achievement and well-being of low-income students, English language learners, and foster care students. The ‘Equity is Justice’ Resolution calls for the adoption of the Student Needs Index, which ensures that more funding goes to schools with a greater proportion of high needs students. As part of their campaign efforts, youth met with LAUSD school board members and staff to hold them accountable to the Student Needs Index. They also conducted peer-to-peer education about LCFF and the Student Needs Index. Additionally, at a June 2016 community forum with recently appointed LAUSD
Superintendent Michelle King, BHC-affiliated youth sought to educate Superintendent King about Boyle Heights’ school funding and other concerns, and hear about her plans to address them.

- **Transforming School Discipline and Safety:** BHC-affiliated youth and adult allies have worked towards reducing the use of punitive school discipline policies that disproportionately target young boys of color. In June 2015, youth successfully advocated for LAUSD to reduce the LCFF budget for school policing by $13 million, and increase funding for restorative justice by $2 million. After this victory, they sought further expansion of restorative justice programming, which aims to holistically address school discipline violations and other conflicts. Quite notably, LAUSD responded to widespread community demands in June 2016 by committing $10 million to restorative justice for the 2016-2017 school year.

- **School-Based Wellness Centers:** In 2014, BHC youth organizations and coalition partners won the ‘Wellness Centers Now!’ campaign, securing $50 million in funding for the expansion and construction of school-based wellness centers at select LAUSD schools. Following up with this victory, BHC-affiliated youth and their allies sought to ensure health services meet their individual and community health needs. At Roosevelt High School, youth have demanded the expansion of existing services and the development of new services, including vision care, mental health services, and reproductive health services. Additionally, youth demand that service providers properly attend to LGBTQ youth’s needs. They also seek to ensure that the square footage of the facility is sufficient. Some of the funds for the Wellness Center will come out of a budget of $130 million that LAUSD has set aside to renovate Roosevelt High School. Meanwhile, at Mendez High School, BHC-affiliated youth and their allies are providing input into the development of a state of the art wellness center facility. Community members have demanded that the wellness center be designed and placed in a location accessible to the community around Mendez High School. To date, health providers have committed to providing services at both Roosevelt High School and Mendez High School.

- **College Access:** In June 2015, BHC-affiliated youth and allies secured passage of the ‘Equity in A-G’ School Board Resolution, which aims to increase low-income students’ access to college preparatory courses and provide them with support so that they can graduate on time. Reinforcing the original 2005 A-G Resolution that increased the proportion of college-ready graduates, the 2015 ‘Equity in A-G’ Resolution requires the LAUSD Superintendent to continue identifying and addressing gaps in resources needed to make A-G course completion a greater possibility for all students.

- **Ethnic Studies Course Availability – AB2016:** Boyle Heights youth organizations participated in a statewide campaign to expand the offerings of ethnic studies courses in high schools. As part of this effort, South Los Angeles youth participated in a rally at the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) headquarters. In September 2016 Governor Jerry Brown signed AB2016, directing the State Board of Education to adopt a model of ethnic studies curriculum which could be implemented in high schools across the state.
• **Fighting Transphobia:** In response to an attempted murder of a transwoman in the neighboring community of Monterey Park, Boyle Heights youth have supported the Trans Lives Matter movement. To raise awareness about transphobia, BHC-affiliated youth participated in rallies outside LAC-USC Hospital where the victim was being treated. Additionally, BHC youth organizations supported city wide efforts to end discrimination against transgender and other gender non-conforming individuals.

• **Demilitarizing Los Angeles Schools:** Through the U.S. Department of Defense 1033 Program, the LAUSD police department obtained surplus military weapons, including an armored vehicle, grenade launchers, and automatic weapons. BHC-affiliated youth and their allies demanded that LAUSD withdraw from the 1033 program, return military weapons, and provide an inventory of weapons received and returned. By February 2016, LAUSD returned weapons, and provided the requested inventory of weapons, and discontinued their relationship with the overall program.

**THE LASTING IMPLICATION OF A GROWING YOUTH MOVEMENT**

Since the inception of the BHC initiative in 2010, affiliated youth BHC organizations have expanded meaningful opportunities for their young leaders to advance their community’s health. These youth leaders are likely to continue their public service and activism as they transition to adulthood. Moreover, given their recent campaign victories, youths’ efforts may have a lasting impact on community health and well-being in Boyle Heights.

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1 For a list of publications related to the BHC youth program evaluation visit: [https://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/bhc-youth-leadership/](https://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/bhc-youth-leadership/)
2 Solorzano, Lizette, Jazmin, and Veronica Terriquez. 2014. *Building Healthy Communities through Youth Programming in Boyle Heights*. Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: [https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/Boyle_Heights_July2014_04.pdf](https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/Boyle_Heights_July2014_04.pdf)
3 Terriquez, Veronica and Abdiel Lopez. 2016. “BHC Youth Program Inventory Survey: Key Findings.” Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: [https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/VT_BHC_Youth_Program_Staff_Inventory_Report.2016.pdf](https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/VT_BHC_Youth_Program_Staff_Inventory_Report.2016.pdf)
4 Terriquez, Veronica and Gabriela Dominguez.2014. “Building Healthy Communities Through Youth Leadership.” Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: [http://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/BHC-youth-leadership/](http://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/BHC-youth-leadership/)