

## Building Healthy Communities Through Youth Leadership

### Summary of Key Findings from the 2013-2014 Youth Program Participant Survey

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To foster the healthy development of youth, The California Endowment (TCE) has invested in youth leadership and youth-led organizing as a key component of its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Initiative. Part of a broader assessment of BHC youth programming, this report focuses on survey results collected from young people in 13 target communities (see sidebar). We rely on surveys of core youth participants from 68 BHC-affiliated organizations that involve their members in leadership development, grassroots organizing, restorative justice, arts and media production, and health-related activities. Findings suggest that BHC youth program participants engage in a range of activities that support their healthy development and build their leadership skills. We summarize key survey results below.

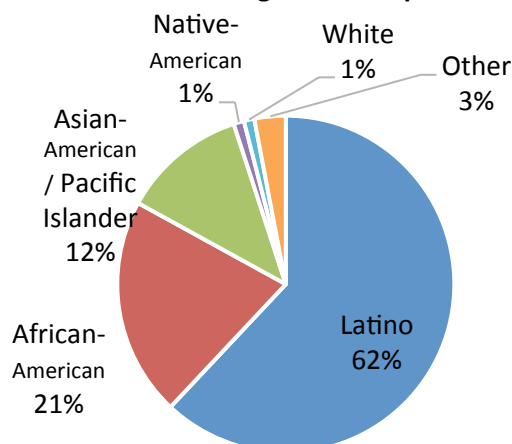
#### Participating BHC Sites

- Boyle Heights
- Central Santa Ana
- City Heights
- Coachella Valley
- East Oakland
- East Salinas
- Fresno
- Long Beach
- Merced
- Richmond
- South Kern
- South Sacramento
- South Los Angeles

#### Who are the BHC-affiliated youth?

The youth surveyed represent 91 percent of “core members,” or regular participants, of BHC youth organizations involved in this study. A total of 1,149 young people ranging in age from 13 to 29, and averaging 17.5 years old, responded to the survey in 2013-2014. Comprising 54 percent of survey respondents, women somewhat outnumber men. Program participants generally reflect the racial composition of BHC communities: 62 percent are Latino, 21 percent are African American, 12 percent are Asian American/Pacific Islander, and the remaining 5 percent are White, Native American or Other (see Figure 1). Sixty-nine percent come from immigrant families. Over three-fourths (77 percent) were eligible for free and reduced lunch while in high school, indicating a low-income family background.

**Figure 1. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Youth Program Participants**



#### What did BHC youth do through their group?

Using a list of activities commonly reported among BHC groups, the survey asked if, through their organization, youth had participated in any of those activities. Results suggest that the groups provide their members academic preparation, leadership development, grassroots organizing, and other opportunities. Half of survey respondents reported participating in activities that prepare them to enroll in or succeed in college (see Figure 2). Many exercised leadership in their groups: 40 percent made important decisions, 39 percent made a public presentation, and 34 percent planned a meeting or event.

**Figure 2. How Youth Participated in Their BHC Group**

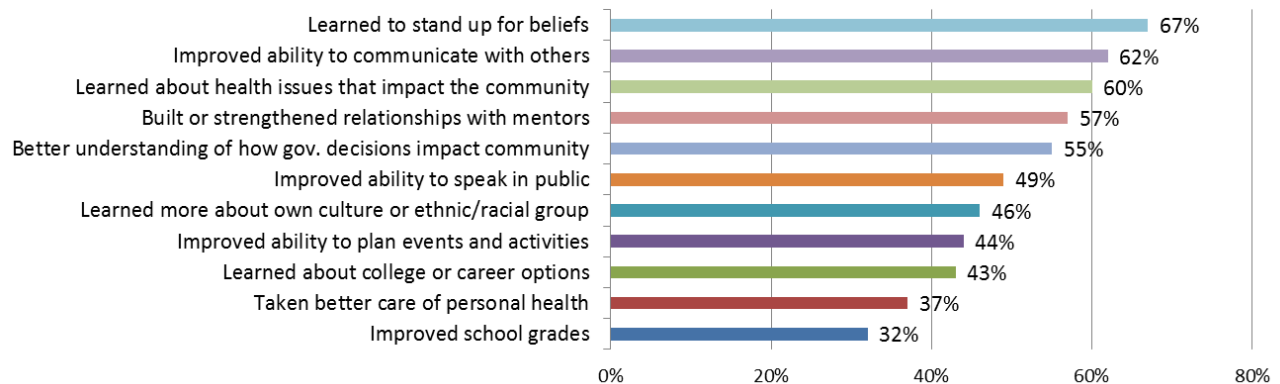
College prep/success activities	50%
Made important decisions	40%
Made a public presentation	39%
Planned a meeting or event	34%
Physical exercise at least once a week	28%
Performed or showcased art	23%
Collected signatures/canvassing	22%
Wrote about community issues	15%
Facilitated restorative justice circle	13%

### How did youth benefit from involvement?

Young people's involvement in civic programs supported their healthy development. Respondents rated how their organizational involvement impacted different aspects of their personal development—did it have *no impact*, *very little impact*, *some impact*, or *a lot of impact*? Figure 3 shows the percent of respondents who reported “a lot” of impact in each of the areas of personal development. Results suggest that 67 percent learned “a lot” about how to stand up for their beliefs, while 62 percent improved their ability to communicate with others. Most also learned “a

lot” about health issues that impact their community, built or strengthened trusting relationships with mentors, and developed their understanding of how government decisions impact their communities.

**Figure 3. Degree to which groups impacted youth, % responding “a lot”**



Overall, this research shows how investment in different types of youth leadership and youth-organizing programs can have broad positive impacts on the personal development and leadership capacity of young people living in low-income communities.

USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) conducts research and facilitates discussions on the issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion, and social-movement building. **Veronica Terriquez** is a Professor of Sociology at USC and is leading the BHC Youth Program Evaluation. **Gabriela Dominguez** is an undergraduate student in USC's Department of Anthropology and lead youth researcher for the BHC Youth Program Evaluation. We thank the BHC research interns and others who conducted survey data collection. For summaries of results from each of the BHC sites, see: <http://dornsife.usc.edu/perere-publications/>

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