

## Youth Leadership in South Los Angeles: Results from the Youth Program Evaluation

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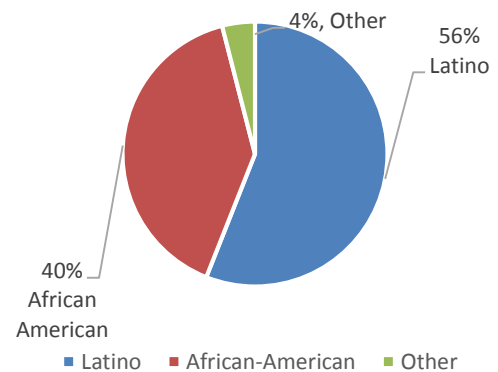
South Central Youth Empowered Through Action (SCYEA) aims to support the academic achievement of South Los Angeles high school students and engage them in local campaigns that promote social justice in their schools and communities. SCYEA is a program of Community Coalition, a South Los Angeles non-profit 501(c)3 organization that seeks to unite local residents in transforming the social and economic conditions that foster addiction, crime, and violence. SCYEA is one of many youth leadership programs funded by the California Endowment to participate in Building Healthy Communities (BHC), an initiative which seeks to improve the well-being in select high poverty neighborhoods.

Drawing on survey and semi-structured interview data collected as part of a broader evaluation of the BHC youth leadership programs, the purpose of this report is to provide a brief overview of the SCYEA youth membership and outline some of the ways young people have been involved in and benefited from this group. We begin with a demographic description of youth survey participants and lay out both how youth were recruited and why they remained in the organization. To provide information on SCYEA's programming, we show how youth members participated in different types of activities. We then share how members benefited from their involvement. This report also relies on semi-structured interview data to help illustrate members' experience in SCYEA and to list some of the group's recent campaigns. We hope that this report informs Community Coalition's efforts to continue its high quality youth programming, as well as provide insights for other programs and initiatives seeking to build the leadership capacity of low-income and diverse youth.

### Description of Youth Program Members

A total of 50 youth ranging in age from 13 to 19 participated in the study. Young women outnumber young men in SCYEA. SCYEA has a long track record of building cross-racial alliances. In line with their efforts to bridge racial differences, 56 percent of members are Latino, 40 percent are African American, and the remaining 4 percent identify as "other" (see Figure 1). SCYEA Members come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Most—76% were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school and 86 percent—were raised by parent(s) or guardian(s) who did not obtain a bachelor's degree.

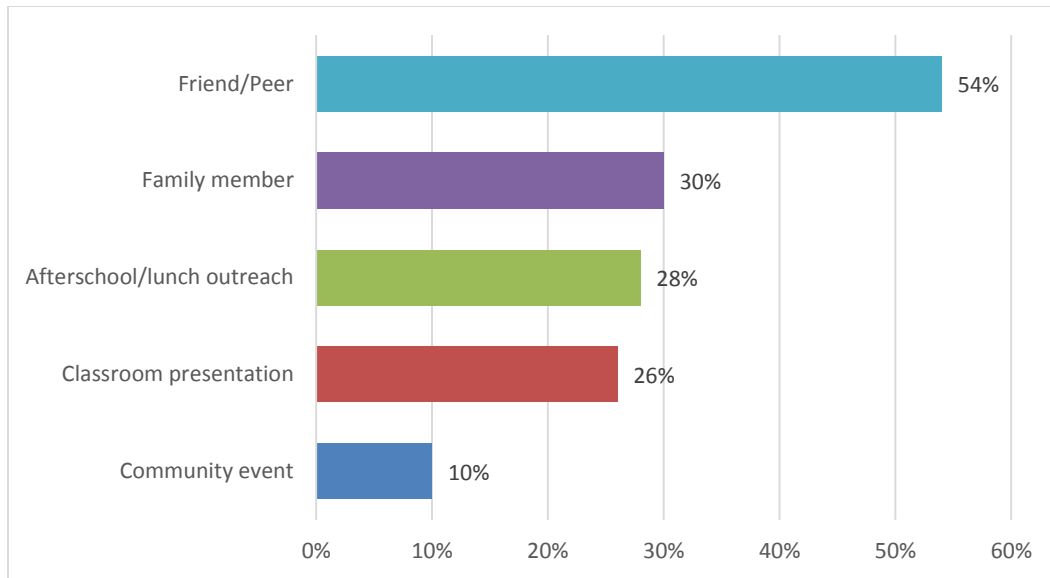
Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of SCYEA Members



### Participant Recruitment and Retention

Survey results indicate that at SCYEA, peers play an important role in recruiting members to their group. Specifically, when asked to share one or more ways in which they first heard about SCYEA, the majority (54 percent) reported learning about it from friends or peers (see Figure 2). Youth also commonly learned about SCYEA through family members, after-school or lunch outreach, and classroom presentations.

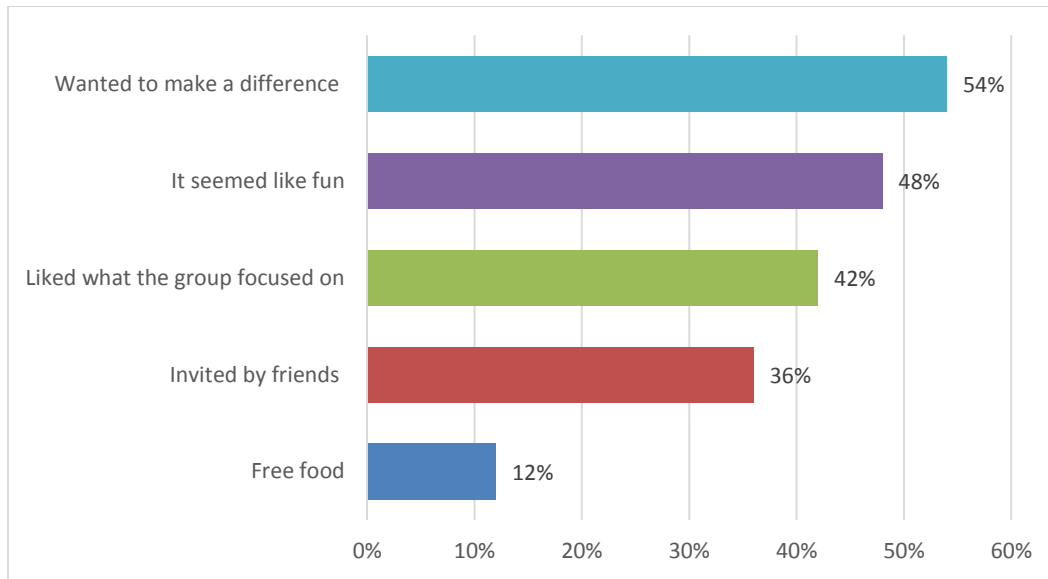
Figure 2. How youth learned about SCYEA



Members were asked to choose one or more reasons why they joined SCYEA. As Figure 3 suggests, most of these youth were drawn to the group with some concern for advancing the interests of their communities. Fifty-four percent wanted to make a difference and 42 percent liked the focus of the group. Other common reasons for joining included having fun (48 percent), receiving an invitation from a friend (36 percent), and wanting to develop new skills (26 percent). These findings suggest that SCYEA attracts young people who are predisposed to helping their communities, but also want to have fun.



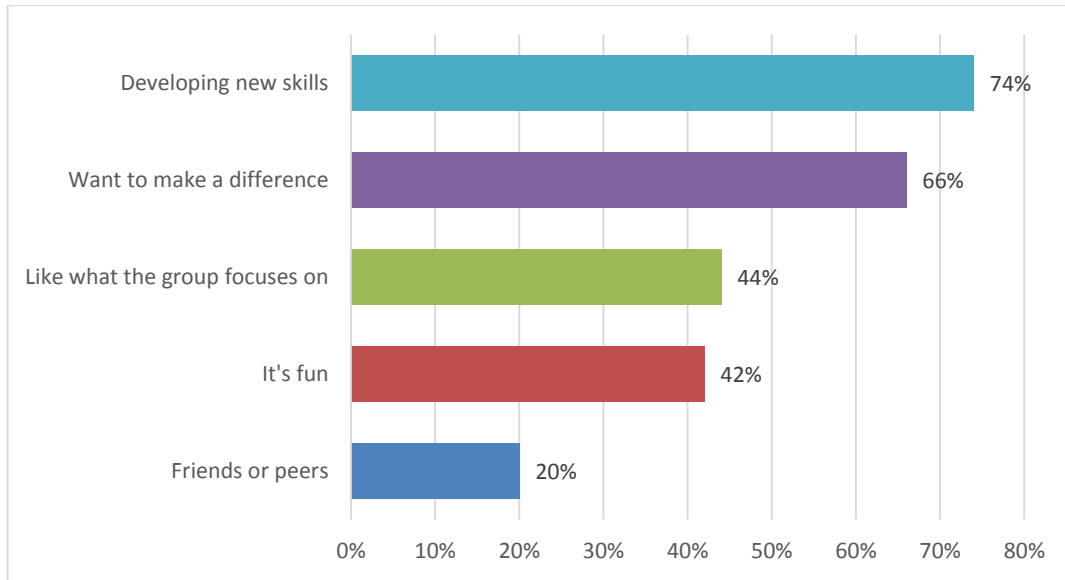
Figure 3. Reason for joining SCYEA



Notably, 44 percent of SCYEA members reported being involved in the group for a year or longer. The remaining had joined within the last year or did not specify how long they had been in the group. Members who have been a part of the organizations longer play a role in developing the leadership capacity of newer members. As one mixed-race, African-American/Latino 17 year old member stated: “we instill leadership skills among the younger ones, so when we leave, we leave [the group] in good hands.”

The survey questionnaire asked SCYEA members why they remained involved in the organization. Interestingly, members’ reasons for staying in the group were somewhat different than why they joined. For example, as Figure 4 shows, 74 percent of all survey participants remained in the group because they were developing new skills; this compares to 26 percent of students who joined because they wanted to learn new skills. This might suggest that students began to recognize the importance of skill building during the course of their involvement. Results indicate that more than half of members—66 percent—also said that they remained involved because they wanted to make a difference, and 44 percent of members liked the focus of the group. Youth likely felt that they were developing the capacity to contribute to the well-being of their communities. At the same time, youth also stayed involved for social reasons, as 42 percent thought SCYEA was fun, and 20 percent remained involved because of ties to peers.

Figure 4. Reason for staying involved



### Members' Involvement

We asked respondents if, through SCYEA, they had participated in any of a list of activities. The list was based on activities commonly reported among BHC groups across the state of California. Results suggest that SCYEA orients their members towards a postsecondary schooling. Notably, 70 percent of SCYEA members reported involvement in college reparation activities through this group (see Figure 6). A significant proportion, 40 percent, collected signatures or canvassed as part of SCYEA campaign efforts. Members engaged in other types of leadership activities, as 38 percent gave public presentations, 36 percent also planned a meeting, and 30 percent made important decisions.



Figure 5. How Youth Participated in SCYEA

Figure 6. How Youth Participated in United Students	
Prepare for or succeed in college	70%
Collected signatures/canvassing	40%
Made a public presentation	38%
Planned a meeting or event	36%
Made important decisions	30%
Performed or showcased art	28%
Physical exercise at least once a week	24%
Facilitated restorative justice circle	18%
Wrote about community issue	10%

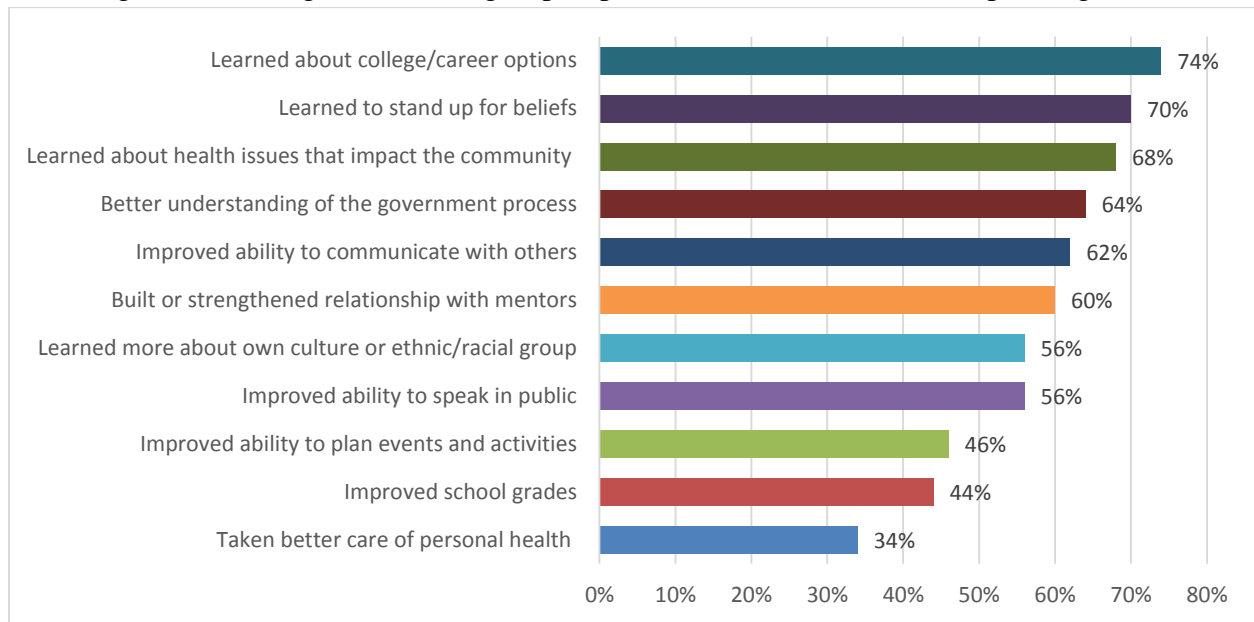
**How Members Benefit From Their Involvement**

Survey results indicate that SCYEA supports the healthy development of their young members. We asked members of the group to rate 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 6 shows the percentage of those who reported that the group involvement had “a lot” of impact on each of the areas of personal development included in the survey. Given that most students participated in college-preparatory activity, it is perhaps not surprising that members overwhelmingly (74 percent) learned “a lot” about career and college options. Notably, 70 percent also indicated that they learned “a lot” that enabled them to stand up for their beliefs. A majority also improved their ability to communicate with others, learned about health issues that impact their community, improved their ability to communicate with others, and acquired a better understanding of how government decisions impact their community. A large share also built or strengthened relationship with mentors, learned more about their ethnic/racial group, improved their ability to plan events and activities, and improved their grades in school. These findings suggest that SCYEA has broad, positive impacts on the leadership capacity of their members.

*“I was going through some personal things so my grades crashed, really affecting my GPA. The reason why I kept on going was because of SCYEA. They were there for me, they were talking to me, they were checking if I needed help. They’d make sure that academics are first...Like, right now I think the reason that I’m passing the majority of my classes is because of them”*

–Latino 17 year old male

Figure 6. The degree to which group impacts its members: Percent responding "a lot"



### Recent Youth-Led Campaign Victories

While South LA’s youth have personally benefited from their ties to SCYEA, their engagement has also enabled them to address education and health-related issues in their community. For example, SCYEA, along with adult and youth allies from across the city, have sought to address the education achievement gap of high-needs students, including low-income students, English learners, and foster youth in LAUSD. Youth played an active role in pushing for LAUSD’s (2013) adoption of the School Climate Bill of Rights, which rolls back punitive discipline policies and creates alternatives to suspension.

*“SCYEA is giving our community hope because they help us fight for causes that are important for us.”*

–African American, 21,  
Female

SCYEA members have also mobilized around the “Equity is Justice” Resolution, which calls for equitable distribution of additional funds LAUSD is receiving as a result of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The resolution called for a Student Need Index as a guide for the distribution of LCFF funds to the schools with the greatest needs. Youth facilitated educational workshops, coordinated break-out sessions at a town hall meeting on LCFF legislation, and collected 4,500 signatures from community members in support of this Resolution. They also mobilized for a rally that drew over 100 youth and parents at the LAUSD Board meeting considering the Resolution. The efforts of youth and their allies helped pressure LAUSD to approve the “Equity is Justice” Resolution which directed the Superintendent to use the Student Need Index in the distribution of funds within the district.

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In summary, this research evidences SCYEA's ongoing track-record of promoting the healthy development of low-income students, and engaging them in successful grassroots efforts to promote education justice and community well-being. SCYEA serves an example of effective youth development and organizing program that may be emulated in other 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. PERE conducts high-quality research that is relevant to public policy concerns and that reaches those directly affected communities that most need to be engaged in the discussion. A faculty affiliate of USC PERE, **Veronica Terriquez** is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California Santa Cruz and is leading the BHC Youth Program Evaluation. **Veronica Terriquez** is a Professor of Sociology at the University of California Santa Cruz and is leading the BHC Youth Program Evaluation. **Luna White** is an undergraduate student at the University of Southern California's Department of Sociology.

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