

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 organizing, advocacy, and other efforts to advance their community's well-being. As part of a longitudinal evaluation, this report focuses on BHC-affiliated youth programming in Richmond.¹ Located in Contra Costa County in Northern California, Richmond is one of 14 BHC sites.

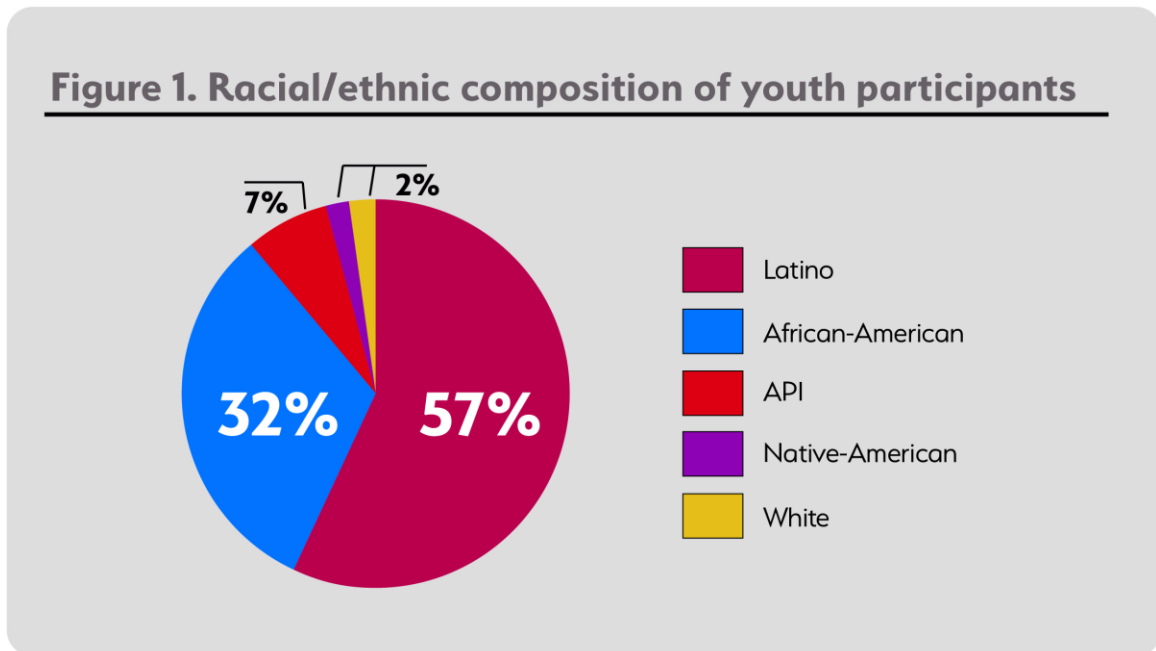
This report draws on survey data collected from the regular participants, or “core” youth members of seven organizations that engage their members in grassroots organizing and advocacy, media production and the cultural arts, practices that promote healing and well-being, and/or other activities. These groups include: 1) California School Based Health Alliance, 2) Catholic Charities of the East Bay, 3) East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, 4) Richmond Pulse, 5) RYSE Center, 6) Urban Tilth, and 7) YES Nature to Neighborhoods. A few of these groups are featured in a 2014 report on BHC-affiliated youth programming in Richmond.²

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, 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 121 surveys collected from young people who regularly participate in BHC youth programs in Richmond. Survey respondents represent 95% of youth leaders in participating organizations. The average age of these members at the time they were surveyed was 16, but they ranged in age from 13 to 25 years. Representing 57% of youth leaders, women outnumbered men. Participants were generally representative of the racial/ethnic composition of the Richmond community. As shown in Figure 1, approximately 57% identified as Latino/a, 32% as African-American, and 7% as Asian-Pacific Islander. The remaining 4% identified as Native-American or White.

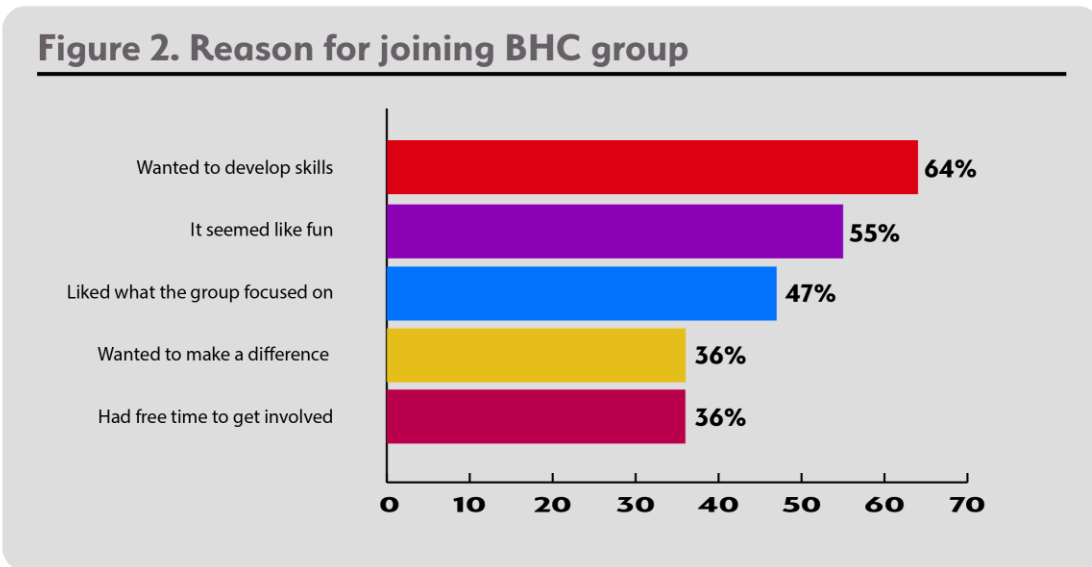
Most youth came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 55% were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school and only 18% were raised by a parent with a bachelor's degree.



MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT

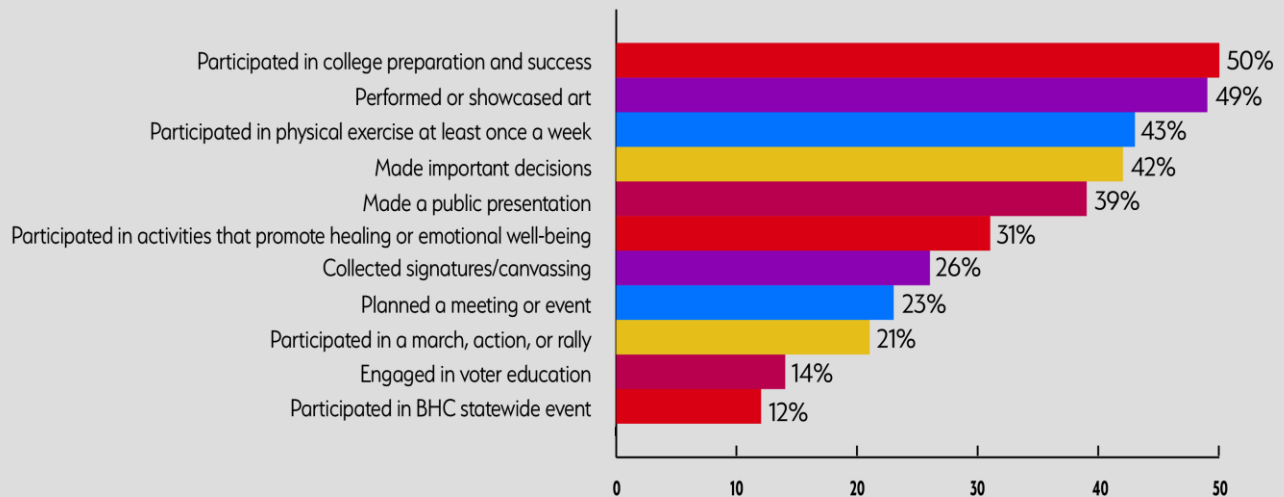
Youth in Richmond vary in how long they have been involved in their organizations. Quite notably, over half of study participants —64%— had been involved in their BHC-affiliated organization for at least a year at the time of the survey. This suggests that overall, BHC organizations were able to retain many youth, offering them extended opportunities to develop their leadership capacity over time. Of the remaining youth, 10% had been involved 6-11 months, 17% were involved for less than 6 months, and some did not specify how long they had been involved in their organization.

Youth were asked to list up to three reasons why they joined their BHC-affiliated youth organization. Figure 2 lists the top reasons for joining. In Richmond, the most common reason given was to develop useful skills, suggesting that young people joined with the expectation of experiencing personal growth. At the same time, many (55%) also joined because it seemed fun; this finding indicates that organizations effectively meet youths’ social interests while engaging them in civic activities. Other frequently reported reasons for joining included having considerable interest in the organization’s focus (47%), wanting to make a difference (36%), and having free time to get involved (36%).



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.³ As shown in Figure 3, youth in Richmond most commonly claimed to have participated in college preparation and success programs, as indicated by 50% of members. Nearly half performed or showcased their work at an artistic or cultural event (49%), and many engaged in physical exercise at least once a week (43%). Some youth also engaged in civic activities, such as making important decisions (42%), giving public presentations (39%), canvassing for a campaign (26%), planning a meeting or event (23%), and attending a march, action, or rally (21%). Just under a third (31%) participated in healing circles or other activities that promote healing and wellness. Smaller percentages educated voters (14%) or attended BHC statewide or regional gatherings (12%). Survey results suggest that BHC-affiliated youth organizations provided youth with a range of opportunities for leadership and self-development.

Figure 3. How youth participated in their BHC group

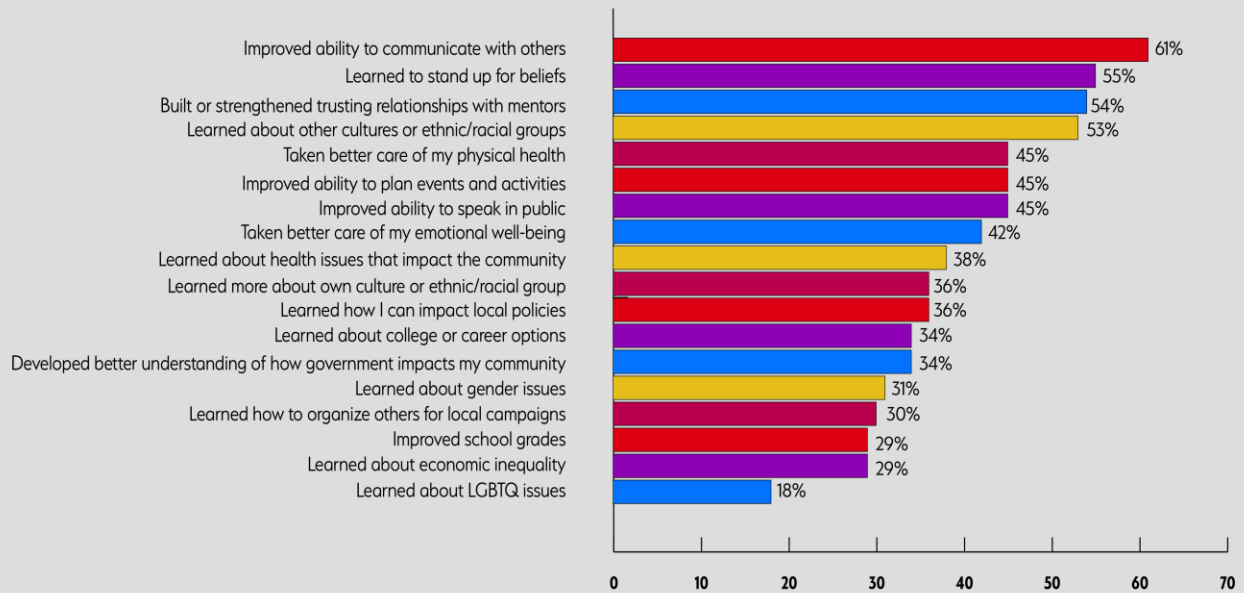


HOW YOUTH BENEFIT FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT

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.⁴ 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 significantly developed their civic capacity. For example, 61% increased their ability to communicate with others “a lot”, and 55% learned a lot with respect to being able to stand up for their beliefs. Many also significantly improved their ability to speak in public (45%) and plan events (45%). In addition, 38% learned a lot about health or other issues that affect their community, and 34% developed a greater understanding of how government impacts their community. Meanwhile, 36% significantly developed their capacity to impact policy change, and 30% learned a lot in terms of organizing others to participate in local campaigns. Lastly, 34% of youth learned a lot about college or career options and 29% significantly improved their school grades, suggesting that some organizations encourage youths' educational achievement and attainment.

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



BHC involvement also had implications for youths’ health and well-being, as 45% reported taking a lot better care of their physical health and 42% reported taking a lot better care of their emotional well-being. The majority also built or strengthened their relationships with mentors (54%)

Importantly, youth learned about their own cultural and racial backgrounds and the diversity of the California population. As results show, 53% learned about other ethnic/racial groups, while 36% reported learning about their own culture or ethnic/racial group. Additionally, 31% learned about gender issues, 29% learned about economic inequality, and 18% learned about LGBTQ issues.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

In addition to supporting the healthy development of members, BHC-affiliated youth organizations also sought to collectively make a positive impact on the community. Their main efforts included the following:

Increased Funding for Youth Programming: After several years of exploring options to increase local funding for youth development programming in Richmond, local organizations came together to support the Richmond Kids First Initiative. This initiative would require the City of Richmond to allocate 3% of the general fund budget to children and youth services. Young people and their adult allies campaigned to collect over 6,000 signatures, which qualified the measure to be placed on the November 2016 ballot. Nevertheless, the city council moved to

delay placing it on the ballot. Youth and their allies plan to campaign in favor of this initiative in the 2018 election cycle.

School Funding Reform: Along with parents and other community members, youth participated in workshops and trainings about the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which provides additional funds for high-needs students and encourages local participation in setting budget priorities. The goal is to engage students and community members in shaping school spending by providing input into the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), as specified by LCFF. Following up earlier efforts in 2013 and 2014, youth and their adult allies have met with school board members and the superintendent to secure increased investments in school health services, school climate and restorative practices, and improved support for African American students and English-language learners.

THE LASTING IMPACT OF YOUTHS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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. Youth leaders who are involved in community change efforts are likely to continue their public service and activism as they transition to adulthood. As Richmond youths' campaigns evolve, their efforts may leave a lasting imprint on community health and well-being.

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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/>

² Solis, Sergio, Angela Ross, and Veronica Terriquez. 2014. "Building Healthy Communities through Youth Programming in Richmond." Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/Richmond_Aug2014_BHC_youth.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

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/>