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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 communities' well-being. As part of a longitudinal evaluation, this report focuses on BHC-affiliated youth programming in South Los Angeles.¹ Home to over 90,000 residents who live in the multiple neighborhoods that make up the South Figueroa Corridor, South Los Angeles is one of 14 BHC sites in California.

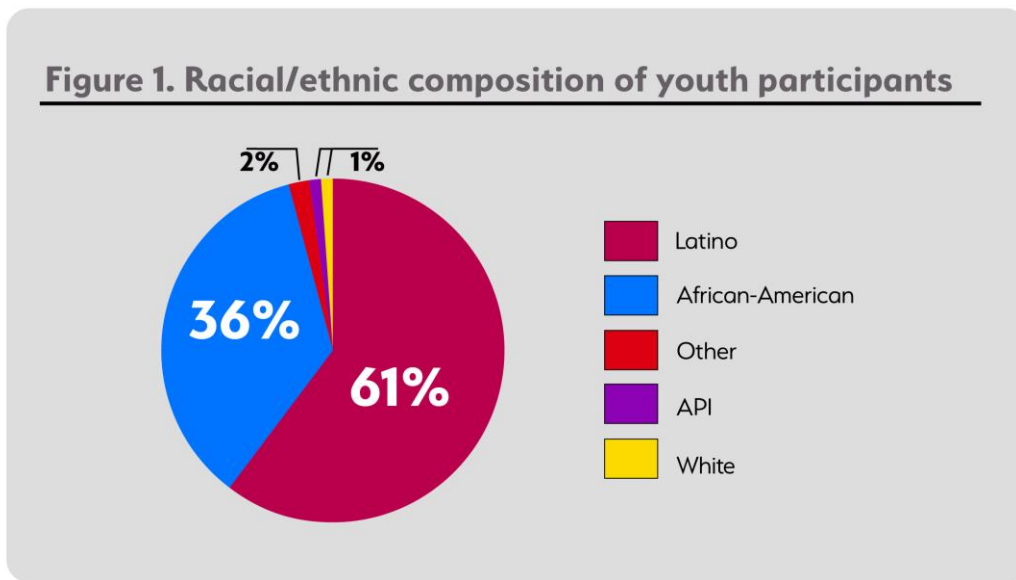
This report draws on survey data collected in 2016 from the regular participants, or "core" youth members of 6 organizations that engage their members in grassroots organizing and advocacy, media production and the cultural arts, practices that promote healing and well-being, and/or other activities. These groups include: 1) Coalition for Responsible Community Development, 2) Community Coalition, 3) Genders and Sexualities Alliance Network, 4) Labor Community Strategy Center, 5) Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, 6) Youth Justice Coalition. Of these groups, three are featured in a 2014 report on BHC-affiliated youth programming in South Los Angeles.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 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 115 surveys collected from young people who regularly participate in BHC youth programs in South Los Angeles. Survey participants represent 98% of core youth members in organizations that participated in the study. The average age of these members at the time of the survey was 18.5, but they ranged in age from 14 to 29 years. Young women and young men were about equally represented.

Participants were generally representative of the racial/ethnic composition of the South Los Angeles community. Approximately 61% identified as Latina/o and 36% as African-American. The remaining youth identified as Asian-Pacific Islander, White, or Other. Most youth came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 69% were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school. Only 10% of the youth were raised by a parent with a bachelor's degree.

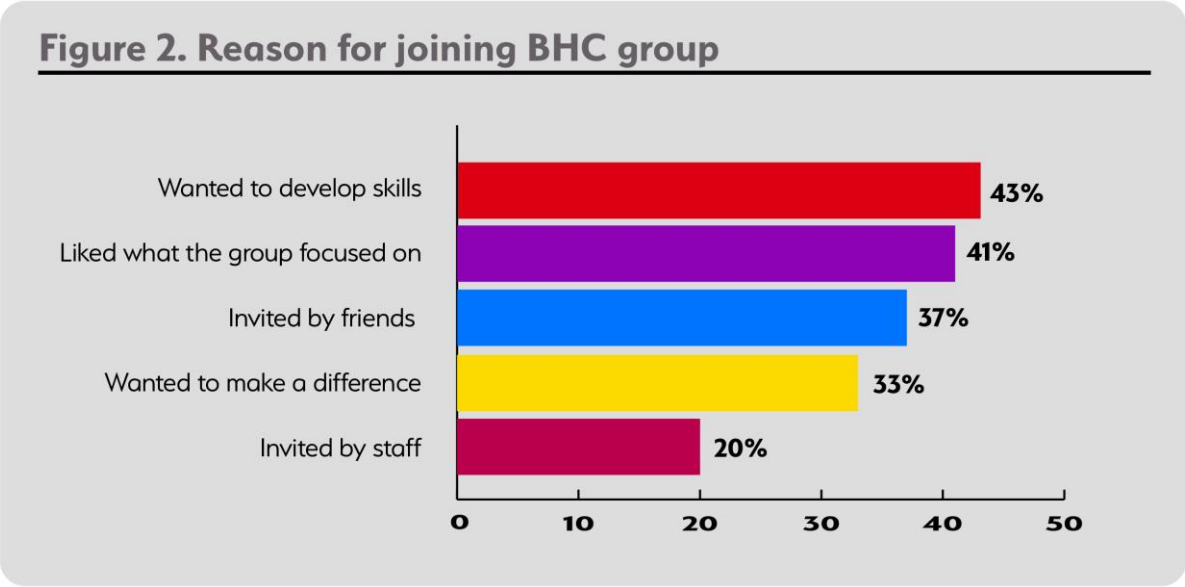


MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT

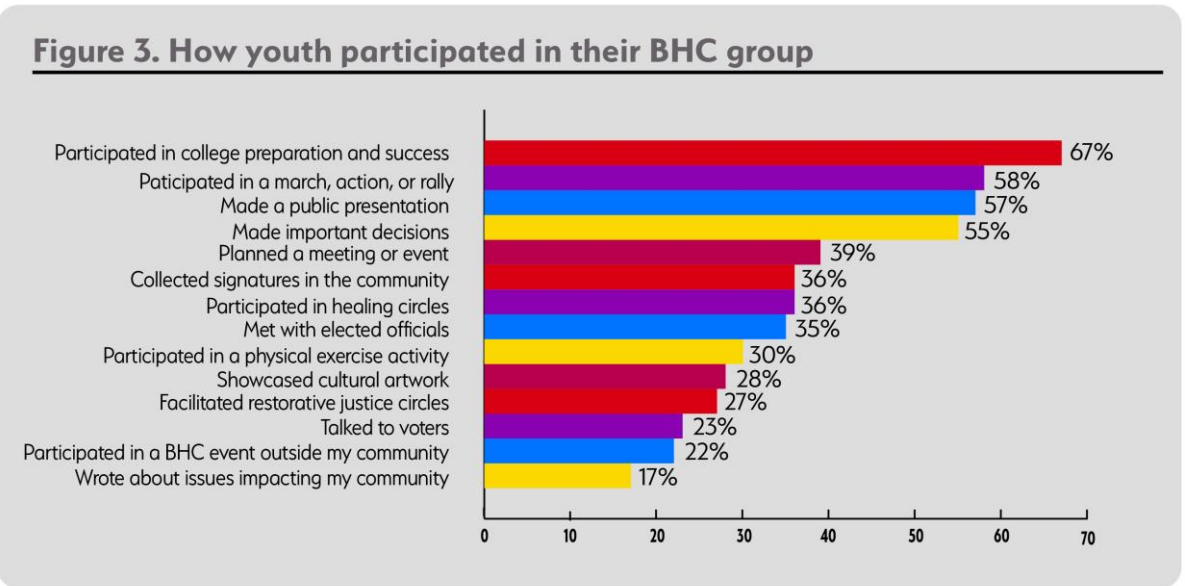
Youth in South Los Angeles vary in how long they had been involved in their organizations. Quite notably, about half of participants —49% — had been involved in their BHC-affiliated organization for at least a year. This suggests that overall, BHC organizations retained some youth, offering them extended opportunities to develop their leadership capacity over time. Of the remaining youth, 15% had been involved 6-11 months and 28% 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. Figure 2 lists the top five reasons for joining. In South Los Angeles, the most common reason given was wanting to develop skills (43%), suggesting that young people joined for personal interests. At the same time, many youth (41%) also joined because they liked what the group focused on, indicating that the programming effectively attracted certain types of youth. Other frequently

reported reasons for joining included being invited by friends (37%), wanting to make a difference (33%) and being invited by staff (20%).



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 South Los Angeles most commonly claimed to have participated in college preparation and success (67%). Many youth participated in civic activities, especially taking part in a march, action, or rally (58%), giving a public presentation (57%), or making important decisions (55%). Some youth also collected signatures for a community cause, met with elected officials, educated voters, or wrote about community activities.



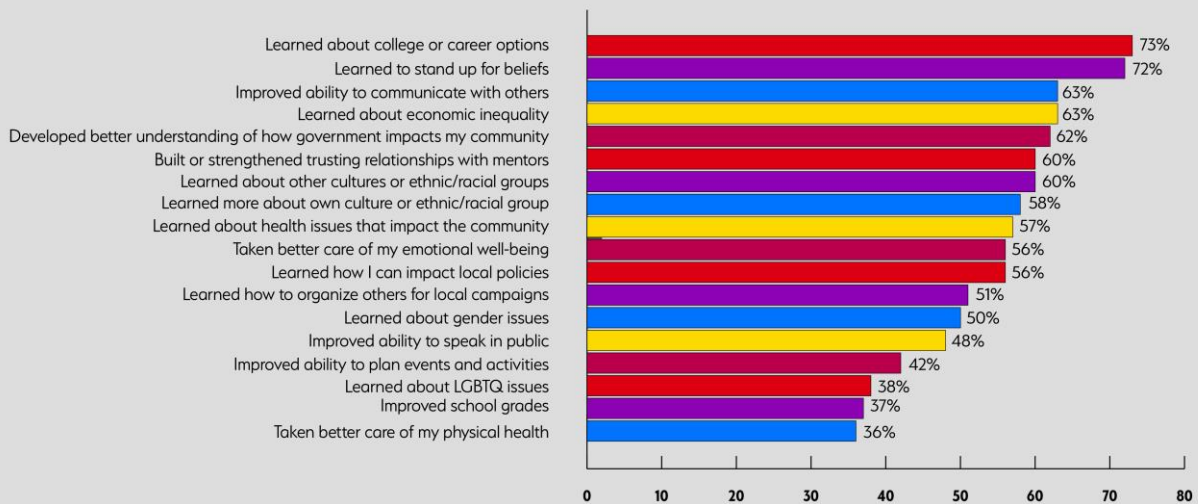
Youth also became involved in activities that promote their health and well-being, such as healing circles (or other activities that promote healing) and physical exercise. Some also showcased art or performed at a cultural event. Survey results suggest that BHC-affiliated youth organizations provided youth with a variety of opportunities for leadership and self-development.

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 felt particularly empowered around learning about college or career options, as 73% reported that they benefited “a lot” in this regard. A similar percentage also reported having learned a lot with respect to standing up for their beliefs (72%). Participation also made a lot of impact on the majority of youths’ ability to communicate with others, understand how government decisions impact their community, influence policy change, organize others to participate in campaigns that benefit their communities. Youth frequently learn about their own cultural and racial backgrounds and the diversity of the California population. As results show, 58% reported learning about their own culture or ethnic/racial group, 60% learned about other ethnic/racial groups, and 38% reported learning about LGBTQ issues. Most also learned a lot about economic inequality. BHC involvement also had implications for youths’ health and well-being, as the majority reported taking better care of their emotional well-being and over a third reported taking better care of their physical health.

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 sought to promote community well-being. Since Fall 2014, their efforts included the following campaigns:

- 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 March 2016 community forum with recently appointed LAUSD Superintendent Michelle King, BHC-affiliated youth sought to educate Superintendent King about Boyle Heights' school.
- 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 dollars to restorative justice for the 2016-2017 school year.
- Ethnic Studies Course Availability: South Los Angeles 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 ethnic studies curriculum which could be implemented in high schools across the state.
- 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.

- Community infrastructure and services: On June 6, 2016 the South Los Angeles community received a Promise Zone designation, making it eligible for additional funding for workforce development, small businesses development, city infrastructure, reentry services for the formerly incarcerated, and coordinated services for high school and college students. Youth joined adult allies in lobbying state legislators to support the Promise Zone application.

THE LASTING IMPACT OF BHC YOUTH’S 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. These youth leaders are likely to continue their public service and activism as they transition to adulthood. Moreover, youths’ efforts may have a lasting impact 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 Dominguez, Gabriela and Veronica Terriquez. 2014. "Building Healthy Communities through Youth Programming in East Salinas." Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at

https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/SouthLA_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

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/>