



November 2016

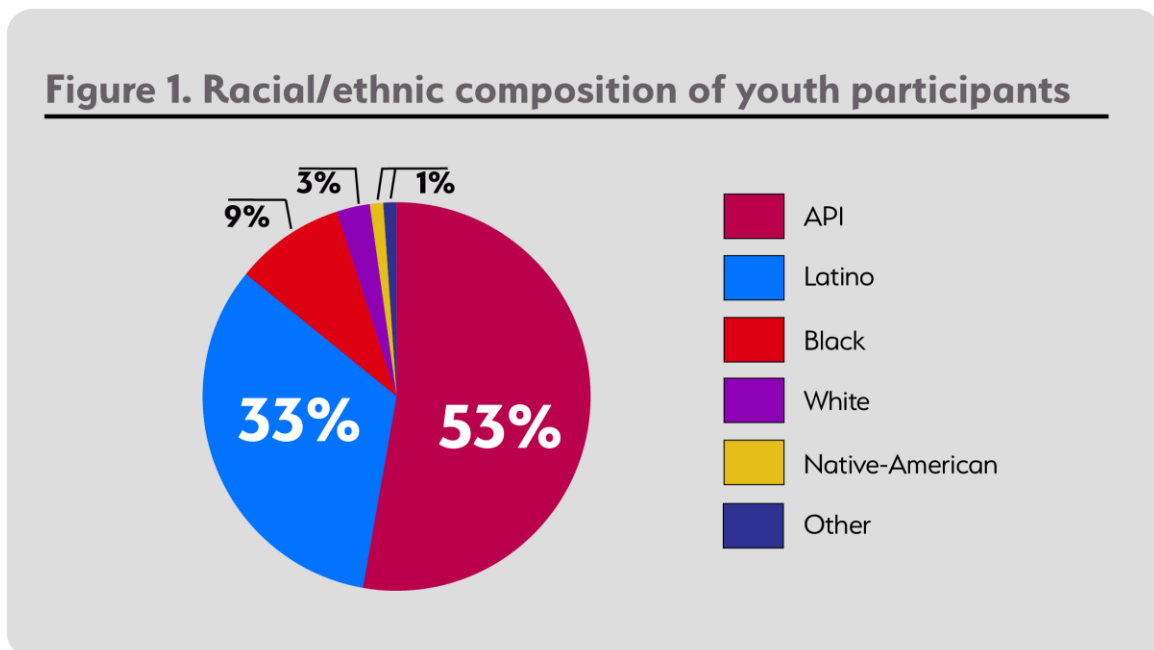
Since 2010, the California Endowment (TCE) has invested in youth leadership and youth-led organizing groups as a key component of its Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Initiative. These youth groups have sought to support the healthy development of their members while engaging them in efforts to promote their communities' well-being. As part of a longitudinal evaluation, this report focuses on BHC-affiliated youth programming in Long Beach.¹ Located in Los Angeles County, Long Beach is one of 14 BHC sites in California.

This report draws on survey data collected from the regular participants, or "core" youth members of eight organizations that engage their members in grassroots organizing and advocacy; media production and cultural arts; practices that promote healing and well-being; and/or other activities. These groups include: (1) California Conference for Equality and Justice, (2) Californians for Justice, (3) Educated Men with Meaningful Messages, (4) Filipino Migrant Center, (5) Gender and Sexualities Alliance Network, (6) Khmer Girls in Action, (7) Voice Waves, and (8) Health Corps. Some of these groups are featured in a 2014 report on BHC affiliated youth-programming in Long Beach.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 147 surveys collected from young people who regularly participate in BHC youth programs in Long Beach. Survey respondents represent 90% of core leaders in participating organizations. The average age of these members is 17, but they range in age from 14-28 years old. Women and men are about equally represented. A small percentage of participants (2%) do not identify along the gender binary. As shown in Figure 1, approximately 53% identify as Asian-Pacific Islander, 33% identify as Latino/a, and 9% identify as Black. The remaining 5% percent identify as White, Native-American, or Other. Most youth come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 73% are or were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school. Only 20% were raised by a parent with a bachelor’s degree.

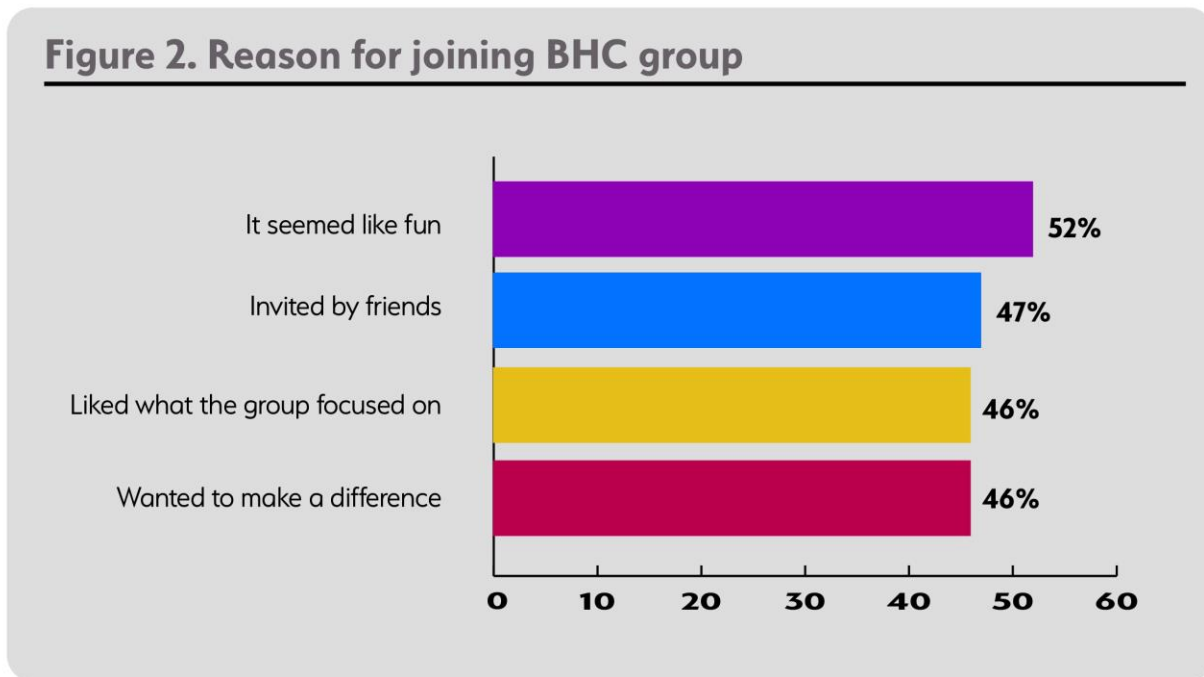


MEMBERS’ INVOLVEMENT

Youth in Long Beach vary in how long they have been involved in their organizations. Notably, nearly two-thirds of study participants —62% —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. Meanwhile, 20% had been involved 6-11 months, while 14% were involved for less than 6 months.

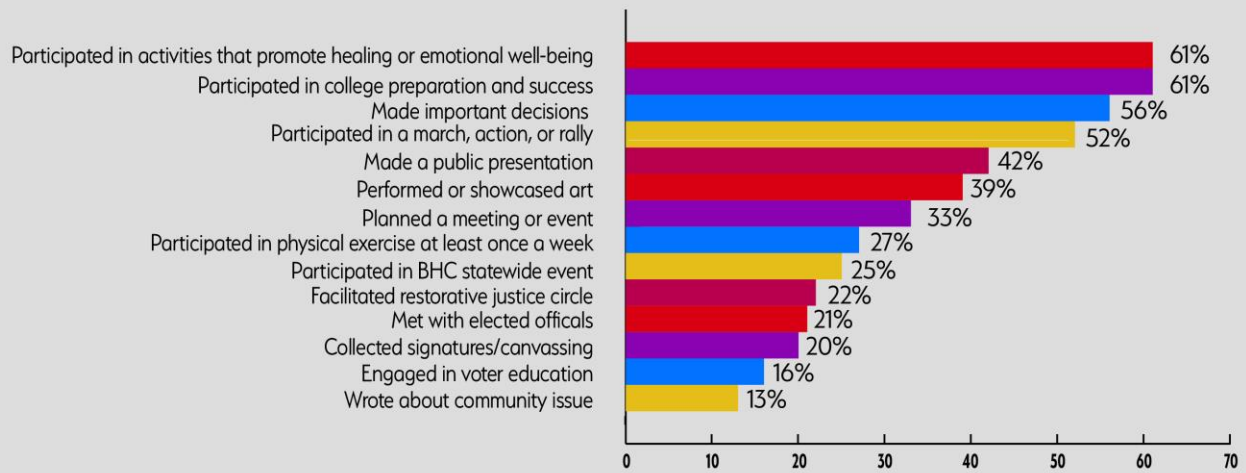
Members were asked to list up to three reasons they joined their BHC-affiliated youth organization. Figure 2 lists the top reasons for joining. In Long Beach, the most common reason given was that the organization seemed like fun (52%). Many also joined because they were invited by friends (47%). Other frequently reported reasons for joining their organization included their interest in what the group focused on (46%) and wanting to make a difference

(46%). These stated reasons indicate that groups attract young people based both on their potential interest in societal change and for social reasons.



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 In Long Beach, youth most commonly claimed to have participated in activities that promoted healing or emotional well-being and college preparation (61%), as indicated in Figure 3. Fifty-six percent of members reported that they made important decisions. Youth also frequently participated in a march, action, or rally (52%). Youth also made public presentations (42%), performed or showcased art (39%), planned a meeting or event (33%), engaged in physical exercise (27%), participated in statewide BHC events (25%), and facilitated restorative justice circles (22%). Youth also participated in activities likely connected to local campaigns, including meeting with elected officials (21%), collecting signatures or canvassing (20%), talking to voters about elections (16%), or writing about community issues (13%). Survey results suggest that BHC-affiliated youth organizations provide youth with a variety of opportunities for leadership and self-development.

Figure 3. How youth participated in their BHC group

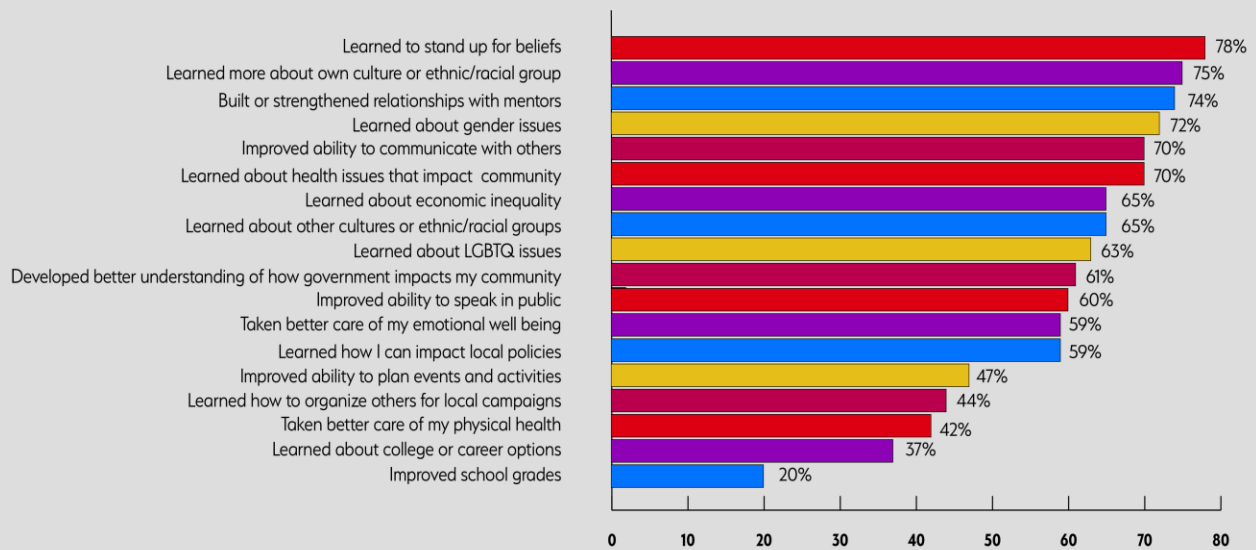


HOW YOUTH BENEFIT FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT

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 percent 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 overwhelmingly benefited “a lot” when it came to learning to stand up for their beliefs, as 78% reported that this was the case. A significant proportion also reported learning “a lot” about their own cultural and racial backgrounds (75%) and the diversity of the California population by learning about other ethnic/racial groups (65%). Participation also made an impact on youths’ interpersonal skills and support networks, as 74% reported building or strengthening relationships with their mentors and 70% reported improving their ability to communicate with others. Meanwhile, 72% reported learning a lot about gender issues, and 63% learned a lot about LGBTQ issues. Some youth developed their capacity to impact policy change (59%) and organized others to participate in campaigns that benefit their communities (44%). Notably, 59% reported that their involvement led them to take better care of their emotional well-being, and 42% reported this was the case as it relates to taking 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, many BHC-affiliated youth organizations also sought to collectively make a positive impact on the community. Notably, Long Beach BHC youth organizations have developed strong collaborative campaigns, all the while maintaining their individual programming and grassroots efforts.

Collaborative Efforts

Since 2014, the Every Student Matters (ESM) campaign, which is coordinated by multiple organizations in the BHC Long Beach Youth Committee, has continued to organize for funding and implementation of restorative justice practices by engaging with the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) development process, organizing events and actions, and holding student delegation meetings with school board members and other decision-makers. In particular, ESM has called attention to a discrepancy between designated funding for restorative justice programs and actual use of those funds. In June 2015, ESM held an action at a school board meeting in which student speakers wore graduation gowns, juxtaposed with student participants in the audience wearing orange (symbolizing jumpsuits), to signify their concern with the school-to-prison pipeline and demand for alternative discipline policies. While doing so, students pressed the school board to build in more time for substantive community engagement in LCAP development.

In April 2016, ESM worked with the BHC parent organizing committee to host a town hall highlighting broader school climate and culture issues. Approximately 200 parents, students, and other community stakeholders attended. ESM engaged attendees to share their personal

experiences through interactive activities. They also proposed a vision addressing racialized disparities in school discipline by implementing restorative justice, positive behavior interventions, and implicit bias trainings; increasing health/wellness services through funding wellness centers; ensuring that Local Control Funding Formula funds are targeted specifically towards the academic preparation of high-need students; and valuing student/parent voices in school and district decision-making. The event also included a forum with candidates for the LBUSD school board, in which participants asked candidates about issues such as community engagement, student success, racial disparities in suspension rates, preparation for higher education, dual language programs, and health services.

ESM has participated in other efforts, such as the National Dignity in Schools week of action in 2015. Youth participants contributed to a social media campaign to highlight exemplars of teachers and other school staff who have supported and encouraged students through mutually respectful relationships. Additionally, ESM has continued building relationships with school board members and fostering engagement in school site councils. Finally, ESM youth participants have taken an active leadership role in broader civic and political engagement efforts. For example, multiple organizations participated in canvassing and voter registration efforts to pass Proposition 47, which reduced certain non-violent felonies into misdemeanors and redirected resources into safe neighborhoods and school funds.

Other Campaign Efforts

In addition to coalitional efforts, organizations have engaged in other grassroots campaigns that complement and deepen the work of Long Beach's diverse youth organizing and leadership development landscape. These include:

- Overseeing the opening of the first teen-centered Wellness Center in February 2016, an outcome of a campaign advocating for school-based wellness centers.
- Initiating a new campaign that addresses high levels of deportation in the Cambodian American community.
- Engaging in a LCAP student advisory council, which holds the power to allocate \$900,000 in LCFF funds. The council was established in response to a campaign asking LBUSD to include student voices more meaningfully in the LCAP development process. Youth are working to ensure that the student advisory council uplifts high-need students in decision-making about LCFF funds.
- Working on a "Flip the Frame" communications campaign, which seeks to positively change stereotypes and perceptions of students of color.
- Advocating for indicators that recognize the importance of school climate and student engagement in California's new educational accountability system.

The Growing Youth Movement in Long Beach

Since the inception of the BHC initiative, BHC youth organizations have, as a whole, developed their capacity to support the healthy development of youth and engage them in efforts to promote community health. Moving forward, organizations hope to continue developing strategies to better support the academic, emotional, and other holistic needs of their youth members. They are also working to ensure that values of racial and educational equity are

reflected in the perceptions and attitudes of school personnel and elected officials. In order to continue advancing community health, some organizations seek to strengthen relationships with local decision-makers as they have at the state level. In years to come, BHC youth organizations will need to continue striking a balance between coalition and organization-specific work as they build a multiracial youth movement.

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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 Rodriguez, Johnny, May Lin, Veronica Terriquez, and Emily Macer. 2014. "Building Healthy Communities through Youth Programming in Long Beach." Los Angeles, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/BHC_Long_Beach_July_2014_V6.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/>