

November 2016

Since 2010, the California Endowment (TCE) has invested in youth leadership and youth 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 organizations in East Salinas.¹ Located in Monterey County and near the California Central Coast, East Salinas is one of 14 BHC sites in California.

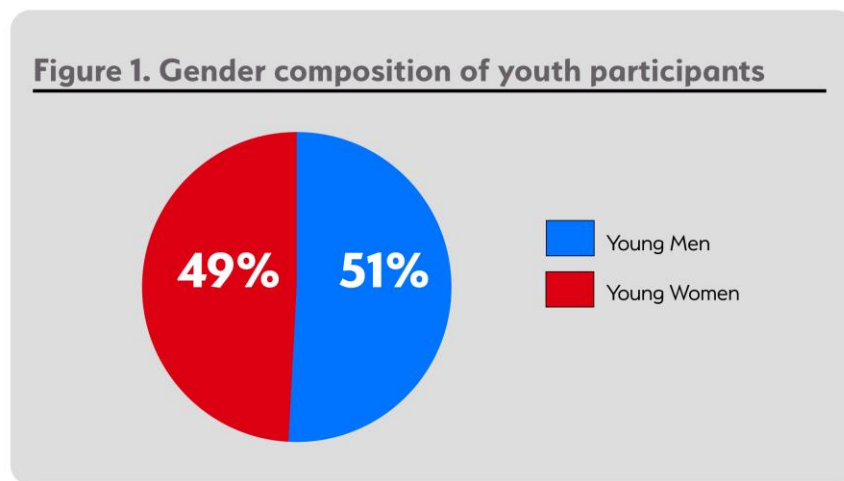
This report draws on survey data collected from the regular participants, or “core” youth members of five organizations that engage their members in grassroots organizing and advocacy, media production and cultural arts, practices that promote healing and well-being, and/or other activities. These groups include: (1) Baktun 12, (2) The Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), (3) Ciclovía Salinas, (4) Motivating Individual Leadership for Public Advancement (MILPA), and (5) Urban Arts Collaborative (UAC). Of these organizations, UAC was featured in a 2014 report on BHC affiliated youth programs in East Salinas.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 capacities, 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 63 surveys collected from young people who regularly participate in BHC youth programs in East Salinas. Surveys come from 94% of core youth members in participating organizations. The average age of these members at the time of the survey was 18, but they ranged in age from 13 to 29. As shown in Figure 1, young men and women are almost equally represented in East Salinas BHC organizations.

The racial/ethnic composition of survey participants roughly reflects the Latino-majority demographics of East Salinas. Approximately 94% identify as Latino/a, while a relatively small number identify as African American, Native-American, or White. Most youth come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as 79% were eligible for free and reduced lunch in high school. Only 5% were raised by a parent with a bachelor's degree.

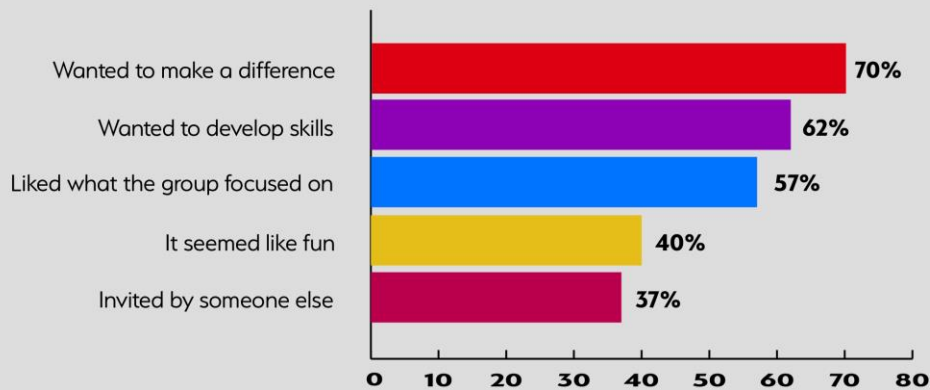


MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT

Youth in East Salinas vary in how long they have been involved in their organizations. Quite notably, over half of study participants —54%— 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, 19% reported 6-11 months of involvement, and another 19% reported less than 6 months. Eight percent of study participants did not specify how long they had been involved with their organizations.

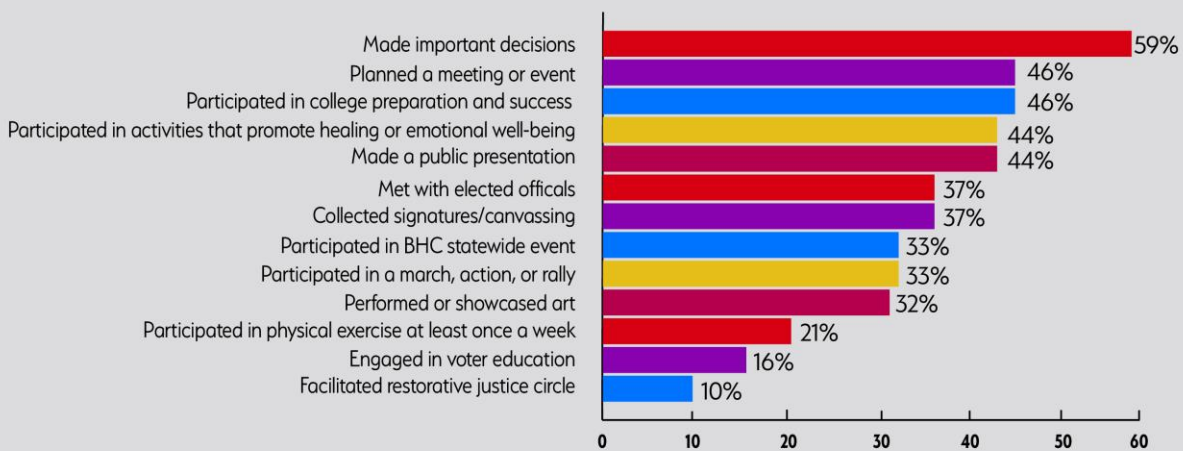
Youth were asked to list up to three reasons why they joined their BHC-affiliated youth organization. Figure 2 lists the top reasons for joining. In East Salinas, the most common reason given was wanting to make a difference (70%), suggesting that youth primarily join organizations to improve their community. A majority —62%— also joined to develop their skills, indicating that youth see a personal benefit to joining these organizations. Youth also frequently joined because they liked what the organization focused on (57%). Other top reasons for joining were because the group seemed like fun (40%) and because they were invited by friends (37%).

Figure 2. Reason for joining BHC group



Youth 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 Notably, most youth (59%) claimed to have made important decisions, as indicated in Figure 3. Many participated in planning a meeting or event (46%), participated in college preparation and success activities (46%), making a public presentation (44%), and engaged in activities that promote healing or emotional well-being (44%). Some also met with elected officials (37%), collected signatures or canvassed (37%), participated in a BHC statewide event (33%), took part in a march, action, or rally (33%), and performed or showcased art work (32%). These findings suggest that BHC organizations in East Salinas offer a range of youth leadership and development opportunities.

Figure 3. How youth participated in their BHC group

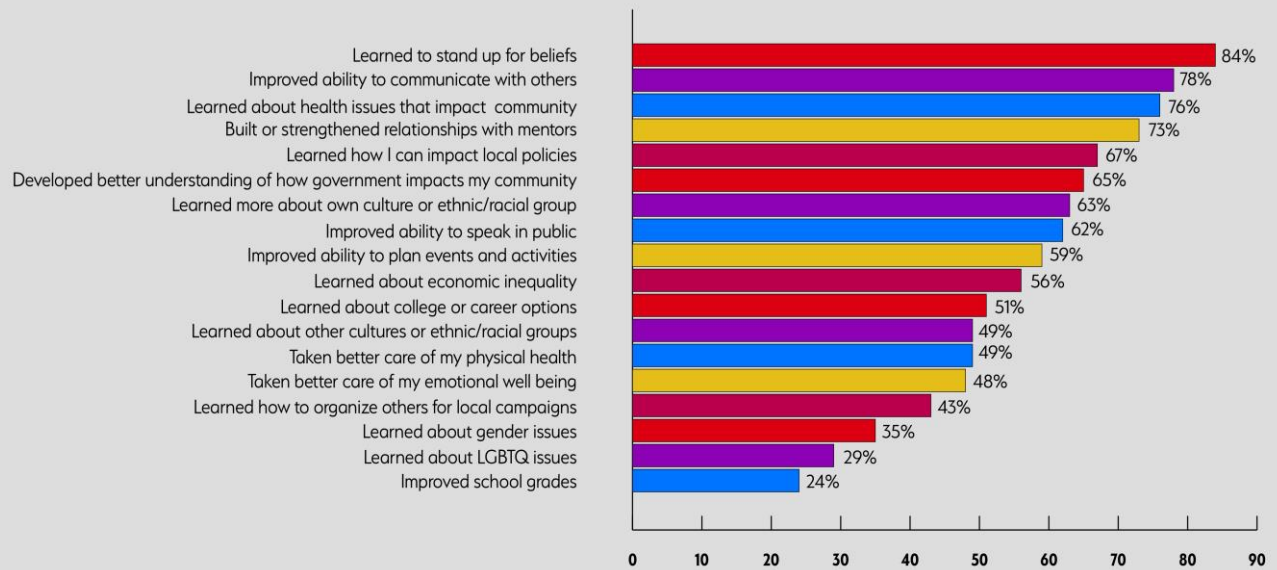


HOW YOUTH BENEFIT FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT

As demonstrated in earlier phases of the BHC youth program evaluation, BHC youth organizations contribute to their members’ development in a variety of ways and to different degrees⁴. 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 overwhelmingly benefited “a lot” when it came to learning to stand up for their beliefs, as 84% reported that this was the case. Over three-fourths (78%) also reported having benefited a lot with respect to learning to communicate with others. This skill can facilitate academic achievement, professional accomplishments, and effective civic engagement. Youths commonly learned a lot about how health issues impact their community, and most also built or strengthened their relationship with mentors. Around two-thirds learned “a lot” about how they can impact local policy, and developed a lot better understanding of how government impacts their community. Youth frequently learned about their own and other people’s cultural and racial backgrounds. As results show, 63% reported learning a lot about their own culture or ethnic/racial group, while 49% learned about other ethnic/racial groups. Meanwhile, 56% learned a lot about economic inequality, and 29% learned a lot about LGBTQ issues.

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



Participation also had implications for members’ health and educational outcomes. While 49% percent claimed to have taken a lot better care of their physical health, 48% percent of youth reported taking a lot better care of their emotional well-being. At the same time, over half learned a lot about college and career options, and nearly a quarter improved their grades in school.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

To provide some context for survey findings, we provide brief overviews of campaigns and related activities coordinated by East Salinas BHC-affiliated youth groups. In collaboration with educators, community stakeholders, and family members, BHC-affiliated youth organizations have engaged in the following efforts to improve the well-being of the community:

- **Promoting community pride:** Serving young people in the predominantly Mexican and Mexican-American community, East Salinas BHC-affiliated organizations have sought to promote members' rich ethnic and cultural history. The purpose is to facilitate youth empowerment and self-esteem by making them feel culturally relevant. Organizations accomplish this goal by offering workshops to teach members about their histories, creating safe spaces for youth to learn about their own cultural heritage, and foster multiracial and multiethnic partnerships across communities. Youth organizations have produced murals, plays, and other artwork that showcases local ethnic and community pride.
- **Expanding access to recreational spaces:** Youth have been involved in an effort to open Acosta Park and Basketball Court near the underserved neighborhood of Acosta Plaza. As part of a larger coalitional effort, youth went door-to-door gathering signatures from residents to demonstrate local support for the park. They also met with elected official, spoke at city council meetings, and sought donations for supplies needed for events (including water bottles, fruit, snack bars, etc.). Youth members also worked directly with park engineers and environmental assessors in order to provide input into the park's design, and they volunteered with construction of the playground. Thanks to community efforts and support from city officials, the park opened in April 2016. In a related effort, youth have worked to improve a stake park in Natividad Creek Park. To this end, youth formed the Skate Board Youth Advisory Council, gathered petitions from local skaters and their families, and successfully lobbied the city to improve the park by adding a water fountain and nighttime lights in 2016.
- **Increasing funding for youth services:** In response to the significant shortage of youth programming in East Salinas, youth in BHC-affiliated organizations sought to increase funding for art and youth programming. Youth organized a march and lobbied city leaders to support local youth activities. In 2016, the city council committed to move \$280,000 from the city's general budget into the city's art and youth budget.
- **Registering and Educating voters:** Low-income voters in East Salinas and many parts of the state are registered to vote at fairly low rates. In response to the limited voter turnout in this community, BHC-affiliated youth devoted time to registering voters in 2014. This same year they also educated voters about Proposition 47, which reclassified certain non-violent crimes from felonies to misdemeanors.
- **Improving physical health:** Since 2012, youth in Salinas have played an important role in organizing Ciclovía Salinas, an annual youth-led community event that promotes physical activity and healthy living. The event takes place on Alisal Street each October. Resource booths and activities are set up along the 1.6 mile route. Attendees walk, run, and bike down Alisal and learn about healthy eating, exercising, and other health-related activities taking place in the community. To organize

this event, youth have lobbied city officials, worked with businesses on Alisal Street, promoted the event to the local community, recruited volunteers, and invited organizations and agencies to host resource and activity booths. Because of its success, the city committed \$15,000 for Ciclovía Salinas in October 2016.

LOOKING FORWARD

BHC youth organizations are seeking to continue having positive impacts on the healthy development of their young members and on community well-being. As part of this effort, organizations are seeking to expand their funding and increase the number of stipends available to attract and retain youth members. The growth and development of programs also rests on increasing access to regular meeting spaces. Additionally, organizations seek to continue developing strong working relationships with the city officials. With additional support, BHC organizations in East Salinas have the potential to further promote healthy activities, empower youth members, and improve the community.

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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 Medrano, Yahaira 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/East_Salinas_July2014_03.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/>