City of San José
Youth Empowerment Alliance

Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST) Grant Program Evaluation

Program Year 2022–2023 Evaluation Report

RDA CONSULTING

CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

BEST Grant Program Evaluation

Program Year 2022-2023

Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Background

Over the past 30 years, the San José Youth Empowerment Alliance (Alliance) has worked to address issues of gang involvement among youth and young adults to reduce youth violence associated with gangs. The Alliance, overseen by the City of San José's Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), takes a comprehensive approach with a public health lens, meaning they view youth violence as preventable. Through this approach the Alliance aims to reduce the impact of risk factors and strengthen young people's resiliency through the implementation of strategies promoting the development of protective factors that can buffer against vulnerabilities early and often.

As part of its comprehensive approach, the Alliance—through PRNS—coordinates the Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST) Grant Program in which PRNS contracts with community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide a wide variety of programs and services in priority neighborhoods in San José. For the fiscal year 2022-2023, the City allocated $2.55 million to disburse to qualified CBOs to reduce youth violence in the City of San José.

As a youth gang and violence prevention and intervention program, the BEST Grant Program funds CBOs who intend to serve youth ages six to 24 who exhibit risk factors associated with gang involvement and youth violence across five eligible services areas. These include (1) Personal Transformation through Cognitive Behavioral Change and Life Skills, (2) Street Outreach Intervention Services, (3) Vocational/Job Training Services, (4) Parent Awareness/Training & Family Support, and (5) Case Management Services. Through these service areas, the BEST Grant Program aims to promote the development of protective factors in youth—such as improved access to resources, services, and opportunities; improved relationships with peers and caring adults; improved life, coping, and/or critical thinking skills; and improved school engagement—that can contribute to a long-term reduction in risky behaviors and delinquency.

PRNS contracted with RDA Consulting to conduct a mixed methods process and outcome evaluation, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to provide a comprehensive assessment of the BEST Grant Program's implementation and short-term outcomes for the youth it aims to serve. This evaluation report assesses program implementation and outcomes for the BEST Grant Program during Program Year (PY) 2022-2023, which began on September 1, 2022, and concluded on August 31, 2023.

Key Implementation Study Findings

The Implementation Study assessed the implementation of the BEST Grant Program, including what was provided, how it was provided, who was served, and how well it was provided. Presented below are key findings across three areas of program implementation: (1) Program Outputs, (2) Program Delivery, and (3) Program Administration.

Program Outputs

Funded Agencies.

In PY 2022-2023, **PRNS funded 14 agencies over $2,711,000** through the BEST Grant Program to provide services through 27 different programs or program components (programs) across the five eligible service areas. Two grantees, New Hope for Youth and Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, received the largest grants due to supplemental one-time funding to provide additional services in specific neighborhoods with emerging needs.

Units of Service (UOS) Delivered.

BEST grantees provided 173,728 UOS, far exceeding their projected UOS of 105,706. The majority of the UOS delivered were provided under the Personal Transformation (67,269 UOS), Street Outreach (48,802), and Case Management (48,629) service areas.

Grantees **provided more than double (284%) the projected amount of UOS in Service Area 2: Street Outreach** with activities such as cold street contacts and pro-social activities.

Participants Served.

In PY 2022-2023, the **BEST Grant Program served 3,366 unduplicated participants**, almost reaching the contract goal of 3,500 participants.

Of youth participants served in PY 2022-2023 for whom population profile data was collected, **80% exhibited characteristics that aligned with the At-Risk and High-Risk population profiles**.

BEST **participants were most commonly Latinx/Hispanic** (61.4%), were of **high school age** (31.4%) or adults (17.6%), **were rarely missing school at the time of their enrollment** (75.3%), and **did not have a history of arrest** (76%) nor an active probation or parole status (79%).

Program Delivery

Assessments. In alignment with the BEST Grant Program model-promoted principle to target interventions based on assessment results, funded programs that have assessment processes reported **using assessment results to inform their service delivery approach.**

Family Engagement. While only one program was specifically funded under Service Area 4: Family Support, in alignment with the BEST model's whole family approach, many programs **reported various ways in which they engage family members of youth participants in services and program activities**. This ranged from sharing information with family members to taking a whole-family approach to case management.

Referrals to Outside Services. Most programs work to **connect youth and their families to outside services as needed** but many described the challenges they face when making referrals, including limited resources available to meet the community's needs and accessibility barriers (e.g., language, eligibility criteria, transportation, etc.). Despite these challenges, **85.6% of surveyed participants reported that they knew about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to them after participating in the BEST Grant Program.**

Trauma-Informed and Culturally Competent Practices. Most programs reported **using trauma-informed and culturally competent practices in their service delivery** approach, but fewer programs reported specific training for staff in this area, with many expressing a desire for trauma-informed and cultural competency training to be offered through the BEST Grant Program. **A vast majority of youth survey respondents reported positive experiences in BEST-funded programs related to the use of these practices (e.g., feeling respected by staff, feeling heard, feeling safe in the program, feeling staff understand their identity, and language accessibility of services).** However, youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian reported statistically significantly less positive experiences on these measures and youth who identified as girls or women generally reported more positive experiences.

Alignment with Positive Youth Development Principles. Overall, BEST-funded programs **implement their programs in alignment with the principles of positive youth development programming** that support healthy youth development. This includes creating environments that promote safety, provide developmentally appropriate structure and tailored activities, encourage positive social norms, provide opportunities for skill development, promote the development of supportive relationships and offer inclusive spaces and opportunities for youth to belong. For example, **85.2% of surveyed participants reported that they always or often learned new skills that were helpful to them, and 90.2% reported that there was always or often an adult in the program who cared about them.** Also in alignment with positive youth development principles, many BEST Programs employ strategies to incorporate multiple systems of support for the youth they serve, including family, school, and community systems. However, some programs noted how this can be challenging and **many see opportunities for growth in developing a community-wide system of support for youth.**

Program Administration

Communication and Collaboration. Grantee staff identified some key areas in which their communication and collaboration with PRNS could be improved, including **more support for the development of BEST program staff** or resources to support their development; **more opportunities for PRNS staff to spend quality time with BEST-funded programs**, such as through monitoring site visits; and reducing turnover in the PRNS Analyst positions.

Training. BEST grantees identified a wide range of **training topics that they felt would be beneficial to their service delivery** and better serving youth, with the two most requested being (1) **trauma-informed practices** and understanding trauma experiences in youth and (2) **diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural responsivity training.**

Key Outcome Study Findings

The outcome study assessed the overall effectiveness and impact of the BEST Grant Program and its impact on program participants. Presented below are key findings across three areas of participant outcomes: (1) Participant Satisfaction, (2) Participant Outcomes, and (3) Participant Photovoice.

Participant Satisfaction

Of surveyed youth participants, **85.7% reported a high level of satisfaction with BEST-funded programs**, and many participants highlighted how fun and helpful the program was and how wonderful and respectful the staff were.

Program satisfaction was highest for youth who identified as Native American/Alaska Native and Black/African American and lowest for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian.

Participant Outcomes

Development of Support Systems and Social Emotional Skills.

Following participation in a BEST-funded program, **87.9% of surveyed participants felt they had developed a relationship with a caring adult** compared to only 60.2% before program participation, and 45% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Over three-quarters of youth participants reported having a person in their life that they could talk to about their feelings compared to only 51% who reported the same before the program, and 52% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Over 87% of surveyed BEST participants also reported confidence in their ability to resolve challenges or problems in their life following participation compared to 59.4% before program participation, and 44.6% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Engagement in School and/or Work.

Across service areas, BEST-funded programs can support increased engagement in school or work for youth, improved academic performance, support to re-enroll in school, securing employment, and improved career readiness.

Following participation in a BEST-funded program, **76.2% of surveyed participants felt they were connected to school and/or their job** compared to only 44.7% before program

participation, and 51.1% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Reduced Engagement in Risky Behaviors.

Of surveyed BEST participants, **83.5% reported confidence in their decision-making ability after participating in the program** compared to only 51.2% before participation, and 50.1% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Over 83% of surveyed youth reported an ability to stay away from peers who could have a negative influence in their life compared to only 57.7% who reported the same before participating in the program, and 47.7% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Positive Visions for their Future.

Participants reported having more goals and plans for their future after participating in BEST-funded programs and increasing their motivation to better themselves and to work towards their goals.

Almost 89% of surveyed youth reported having goals and plans for their future after participation compared to only 60.2% who reported the same before participation, and 44.4% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Participant Photovoice

To gain a deeper understanding of the youth experience in BEST-funded programs and their impact, youth participants from PY 2022-2023 were invited to participate in a photovoice project in the summer of 2023. A photovoice engagement invites youth participants to take photographs in response to a series of prompts using a personal smartphone camera or similar. **This photovoice project aimed to allow youth participants to illustrate, highlight, and capture their experience and program impact, if any, through their lens and their voice.** Presented here is one of the photos taken by BEST participant, David Rodriguez.
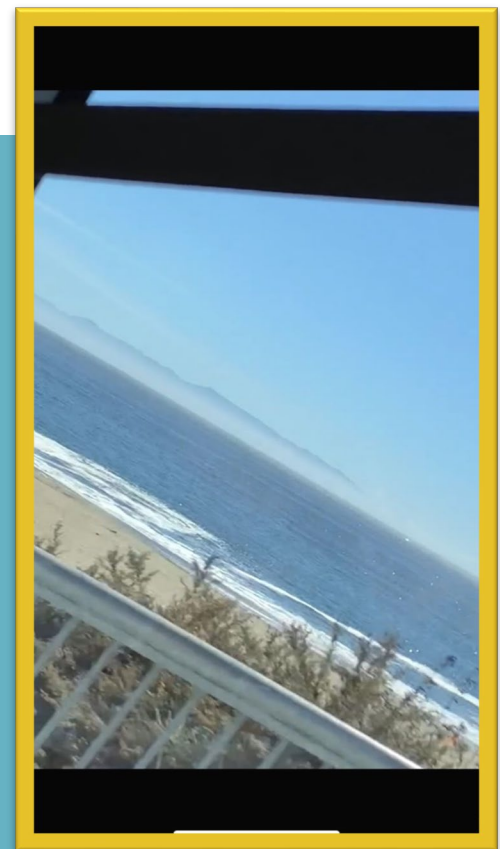
"They will show you a different view of the world and show that there is more to it than just the streets."

David Rodriguez, BEST participant

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, the San José Youth Empowerment Alliance (Alliance), formerly known as the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force, has worked to address issues of gang involvement among youth and young adults to reduce youth violence associated with gangs. The Alliance is overseen by the City of San José's Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS). The Alliance comprises a broad coalition of local residents, school officials, community and faith-based organizations, local law enforcement, and city, county and state government leaders. The Alliance brings these diverse stakeholders together and leverages each group's expertise as part of a coordinated, interagency effort to curb gang-related activity in San José. The Alliance takes a comprehensive approach with a public health lens, meaning they view youth violence as preventable. As such, the Alliance's approach is to reduce the impact of risk factors and strengthen young people's resiliency through the implementation of strategies promoting the development of protective factors that can buffer against vulnerabilities early and often.

As part of its comprehensive approach, the Alliance—through PRNS—coordinates the Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST) Grant Program in which PRNS contracts with community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide a wide variety of programs and services in priority neighborhoods in San José. Over the past 20 years the BEST Grant Program has been annually awarding funds ranging from $1 million to $4 million in any given fiscal year. For the fiscal year 2022-2023, the City allocated $2.55 million to disburse to qualified CBOs to reduce youth violence in the City of San José.

This evaluation report assesses program implementation and outcomes for the BEST Grant Program during Program Year (PY) 2022-2023, which began on September 1, 2022, and concluded on August 31, 2023.

San José BEST Grant Program

Target Population

As a youth gang and violence prevention and intervention program, the BEST Grant Program aims to serve youth ages six to 24 who exhibit risk factors associated with one of the Target Population Profiles outlined in Table 1. The Target Population Profiles range from At-Risk to Gang-Intentional.

Table 1. BEST Target Population Profiles

Population Category	Profile Characteristics
At-Risk	Youth demonstrates vulnerability to becoming high-risk: • Lives in a gang-impacted area and has witnessed violence. • Has peers who are engaging in high-risk behaviors. • Has challenges in impulse control, family relationships, antisocial peers, personal accountability, prosocial activities, and/or positive goal setting.
High-Risk	Youth shows behaviors and attitudes that put them at risk for gang influence: • Has experienced or has participated in gang intimidation. • Is open to seeing violence as a way to settle disagreements. • Casually or occasionally associates with people exhibiting gang characteristics. • Has withdrawn from hobbies and goal-oriented activities. • Admires aspects of gang lifestyle but is not readily identifiable as or officially involved with a gang.
Gang-Impacted	Youth exhibits high-risk behaviors related to gang lifestyle: • Has had numerous fights. • May be physically identifiable as affiliated with a gang. • Personally knows and associates with gang members. • May claim turf or group identity but still values independence from gang. • May be ready to join but has not officially joined a gang.
Gang-Intentional	Youth self-identifies and/or is identified by law enforcement: • Views intimidation and violence as a legitimate means to gaining influence/prestige. • Is actively engaged in gang activities/rivalries/business. • Associates primarily with gang members. • Rejects values other than those of the gang.

In addition to the target population of youth who are served through the BEST Grant Program, PRNS aims to target BEST services in San José neighborhoods with higher levels of violence and a greater need for resources and services. These priority neighborhoods, organized by San José Police Department Division, are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. BEST Priority Neighborhoods

Foothill Division
1. Foxdale Apartments- Tallahassee Dr./Samoa Way/Capitol Expy./Foxdale Dr. 2. Valley Palms and San Jose Apt. Area- Lanai Rd./Tully Rd/Cunningham/Midfield Ave. 3. Kollmar Area-Story Rd./Capitol Ave./McGinness Ave./Murtha Dr. 4. Overfelt Area-Tully Rd./Ocala Ave./King Rd./Hillview Airport 5. Poco Way-Sunset Ave./Story Rd./King Rd./HWY 680 6. Mayfair Area-McCreery/E. San Antonio St./HWY 280/N. Jackson Ave. 7. Emerging Neighborhood – Plata Arroyo – McKee Rd./Alum Rock Rd./King Rd. 8. Emerging Neighborhood – Meadowfair

9.	Emerging Neighborhood - Capitol Park-Bambi Ln./Capitol Expressway/Story Rd./S. Jackson Ave.
Southern Division	
1.	Round Table/Great Oaks Area - War Admiral Ave./Great Oaks Dr./Monterey Hwy/Edenview Dr.
2.	Hoffman/Via Monte - Blossom Hill Rd./Gallup Dr./Almaden Expressway/Croydon Ave.
3.	Seven Trees – Senter Rd./Cas Dr./E. Capital
4.	Coy Park/Tradewinds – Coy Park/Eagles Dr./Spinmaker Dr./Judith St.
Western Division	
1.	Washington Area - Grant St./Duane St./2nd St./Goodyear St./Palm St.
2.	Santee/Audubon - Story Rd./Crucero Dr./Bacchus Dr./McLaughlin Ave.
3.	Cadillac/Winchester - Payne Ave./Winchester Blvd./Hamilton Ave./Eden Ave.
4.	Buena Vista/San Carlos – San Carlos Ave./Meridian Ave./Parkmoor Ave./Leigh Ave.
5.	Emerging Neighborhood – Alma Area
6.	Emerging Neighborhood - Fruitdale Ave. - S. Bascom Ave./Kingman Ave./Menker Ave./Fruitdale Ave.
7.	Emerging Neighborhood – Owsley Ave. Area
8.	Emerging Neighborhood – Rock Springs
Central Division	
1.	Roosevelt Park Area - McKee Rd./Story Rd./E. Santa Clara/Coyote Creek
2.	Jeanne Ave. Area - Jeanne Ave./22nd St./William St./McLaughlin Ave.
3.	10th and Williams. - E. William St./ Margaret St./7th St.
4.	Julian Street. – Empire St./St. James St./10th St.

Program Design

Through the BEST Grant Program, PRNS funds CBOs that provide youth services and programming across five eligible service areas, outlined in Table 3 below. Grantees deliver these services at multiple locations, including in CBO offices, schools, and juvenile detention facilities, as well as in the community in designated geographic areas. In PY 2022-2023, PRNS granted 14 agencies $2,711,328 in funding across these five eligible service areas (service areas). Agencies may apply for and receive funding in multiple service areas.

Table 3. BEST Grant Program Eligible Service Areas

Eligible Service Area	Service Description
Personal Transformation through Cognitive Behavioral Change and Life Skills (Personal Transformation)	School-based services engage youth in critical thinking and decision-making activities that result in transforming their lives. Curricula focuses on recognizing harmful behavioral and thought patterns and providing tools and coping mechanisms to shift negative thinking in ways that produce positive behavioral outcomes. School support groups focus on intrapersonal and interpersonal problems as well as enhancing youth school engagement and performance.

Eligible Service Area	Service Description
Street Outreach Intervention Services (Street Outreach)	Services for youth and families at highest risk for gang involvement in City-identified priority neighborhoods. Street Outreach Workers reach out to priority neighborhoods to make contacts with youth, families, schools, and other service providers. Street Outreach services follow the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, and staff are expected to serve Gang-Impacted and Gang-Intentional youth who can be difficult to reach and engage through institutionalized services. Agencies who receive funding for Street Outreach Services must also provide Case Management Services.
Vocational/Job Training Services (Vocational)	Offers employment training programs for youth who are involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system to prepare participants for employment and may also provide job placement services and the support necessary to help participants retain employment already secured. In addition to employment support, Vocational/Job Training Services may also include services aimed at helping participants obtain high school diploma equivalency testing, GED certification, or other higher education goals.
Parent Awareness/Training & Family Support (Family Support)	Parent training includes a curriculum to assess and enable/encourage the following: cultivating supportive parent–child relationships, positive disciplinary methods; close parental monitoring and supervision; parental advocacy for their children; and parents' pursuit of information and support services to aid with consistently buffering youth from influences leading to risky behaviors. Services are also intended to increase family access to services and provide parents/caregiver a path to become more involved in their children's healthy development.
Case Management Services (Case Management)	These services provide an individualized approach to developing long-term goals with youth who are at highest risk for gang involvement. Case Management Services include a risk assessment and individualized service plan for youth and provide the services necessary to reach their identified service plan goals. Case Management Services <u>must</u> be paired with services in another eligible service area (i.e., personal transformation, street outreach, vocational, or parent support).

Program Goals & Objectives

The overarching goal of the BEST Grant Program is to promote the development of protective factors in youth that can buffer against vulnerabilities to violence and gang involvement. Protective factors include improved access to resources, services, and opportunities; improved relationships with peers and caring adults; improved life, coping, and/or critical thinking skills; and improved school engagement (see Figure 1 for the BEST Grant Program Theory of Change Model).[1] Combined, these improved protective factors contribute to a long-term reduction in risky behaviors and delinquency, such as violence and gang involvement, arrests, and other involvement with the criminal legal system.[2]

While the BEST Grant Program does not specify annual goals or objectives for the overall grant program, at the beginning of each funding cycle, each grantee commits to provide a specified amount of service output goals that align with the BEST service strategies and programs for which they received funding. These contracted goals may include a count of the number of unduplicated participants per year, number of sessions provided, length of sessions provided, and the average number of participants per session.

In addition to contracted output goals, the program outcomes for each grantee are expected to align with their funded service area. As seen in Figure 1 on the following page, BEST services are designed to improve short- and medium-term outcomes around positive youth development (e.g., improved self-esteem, improved coping mechanisms, improved connectedness) and increased school engagement (e.g., improved attendance, reduced disciplinary measures). Less directly, BEST services are designed to lead to improvements in longer-term outcomes, like continued academic engagement/achievement and outcomes related to reduced criminal justice involvement (e.g., reduced arrests and probation involvement).

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[1] These short- and medium-term outcomes identified in the BEST Grant Program Theory of Change Model generally align with positive youth development models. See the following resources for more information:
John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities – *Positive youth development: Individual, setting, and system level indicators.* October 2009. Retrieved 12/16/22 from
https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj24036/files/media/file/tri-level_positive_youth_development_issue_brief.pdf.
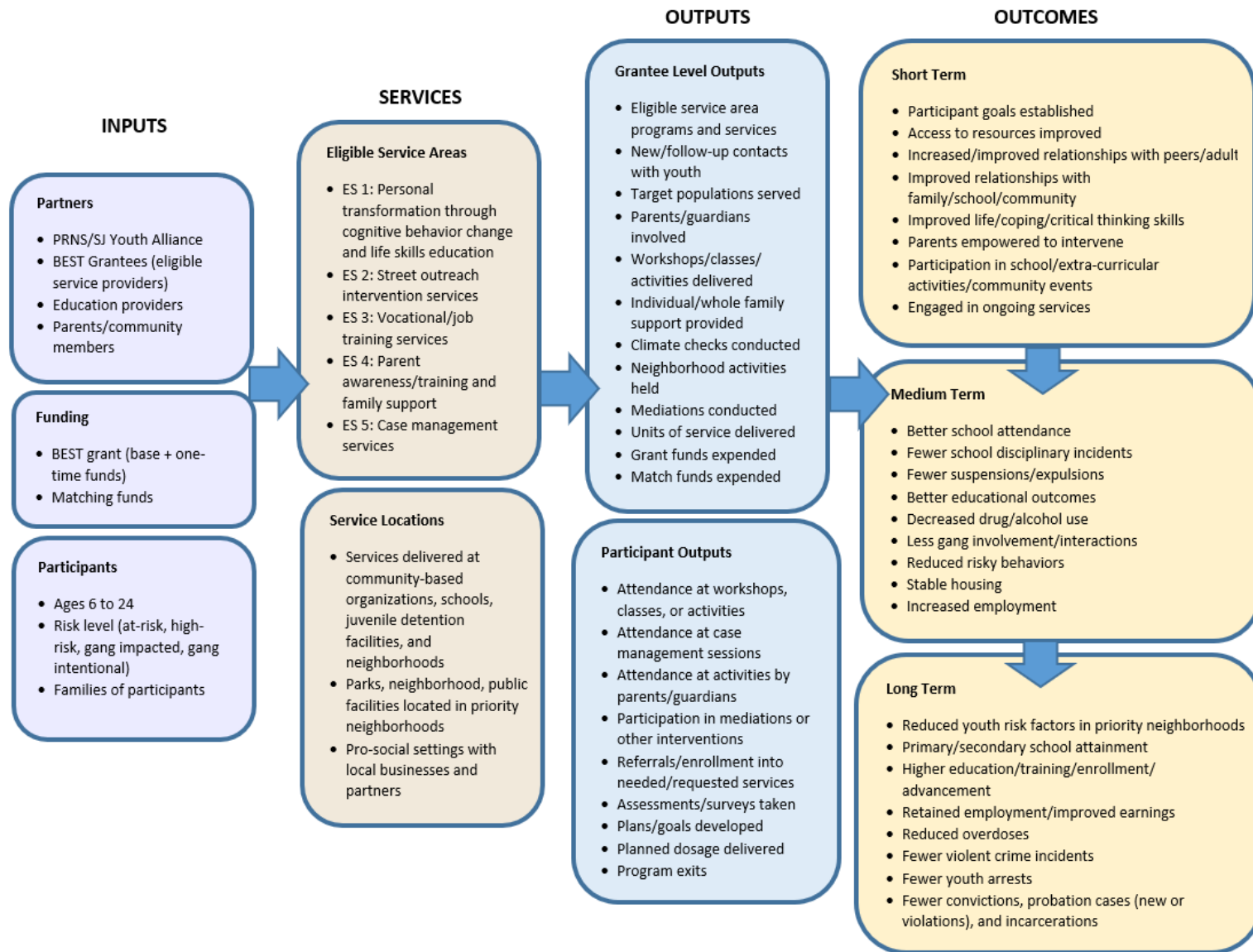Full Frame Initiative and Missouri Division of Youth Services – *The five domains of wellbeing for youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system.* 2016. Retrieved 12/16/22 from **https://www.fullframeinitiative.org/our_resources/the-five-domains-of-wellbeing-for-youth-and-youth-involved-in-the-juvenile-justice-system**.
Center for the Study of Social Policy – *Youth thrive: A framework to help adolescents overcome trauma and thrive.* 2015. Retrieved 12/16/22 from **https://cssp.org/resource/youth-thrive-a-framework-to-help-adolescents-overcome-trauma-and-thrive/**.
[2] Li, Y., Zhang, W., Liu, J., Arbeit, M. R., Schwartz, S. J., Bowers, E. P., & Lerner, R. M. (2011). *The role of school engagement in preventing adolescent delinquency and substance use: A survival analysis.* Journal of Adolescence, 34(6), 1181–1192. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.07.003

Figure 1. San José BEST Theory of Change

INPUTS

SERVICES

OUTPUTS

OUTCOMES

Partners

- PRNS/SJ Youth Alliance
- BEST Grantees (eligible service providers)
- Education providers
- Parents/community members

Funding

- BEST grant (base + one-time funds)
- Matching funds

Participants

- Ages 6 to 24
- Risk level (at-risk, high-risk, gang impacted, gang intentional)
- Families of participants

Eligible Service Areas

- ES 1: Personal transformation through cognitive behavior change and life skills education
- ES 2: Street outreach intervention services
- ES 3: Vocational/job training services
- ES 4: Parent awareness/training and family support
- ES 5: Case management services

Service Locations

- Services delivered at community-based organizations, schools, juvenile detention facilities, and neighborhoods
- Parks, neighborhood, public facilities located in priority neighborhoods
- Pro-social settings with local businesses and partners

Grantee Level Outputs

- Eligible service area programs and services
- New/follow-up contacts with youth
- Target populations served
- Parents/guardians involved
- Workshops/classes/activities delivered
- Individual/whole family support provided
- Climate checks conducted
- Neighborhood activities held
- Mediations conducted
- Units of service delivered
- Grant funds expended
- Match funds expended

Participant Outputs

- Attendance at workshops, classes, or activities
- Attendance at case management sessions
- Attendance at activities by parents/guardians
- Participation in mediations or other interventions
- Referrals/enrollment into needed/requested services
- Assessments/surveys taken
- Plans/goals developed
- Planned dosage delivered
- Program exits

Short Term

- Participant goals established
- Access to resources improved
- Increased/improved relationships with peers/adult
- Improved relationships with family/school/community
- Improved life/coping/critical thinking skills
- Parents empowered to intervene
- Participation in school/extra-curricular activities/community events
- Engaged in ongoing services

Medium Term

- Better school attendance
- Fewer school disciplinary incidents
- Fewer suspensions/expulsions
- Better educational outcomes
- Decreased drug/alcohol use
- Less gang involvement/interactions
- Reduced risky behaviors
- Stable housing
- Increased employment

Long Term

- Reduced youth risk factors in priority neighborhoods
- Primary/secondary school attainment
- Higher education/training/enrollment/advancement
- Retained employment/improved earnings
- Reduced overdoses
- Fewer violent crime incidents
- Fewer youth arrests
- Fewer convictions, probation cases (new or violations), and incarcerations

Evaluation Methodology

PRNS contracted RDA Consulting (RDA) to conduct a mixed method process and outcome evaluation of the BEST Grant Program guided by an evaluation plan that was collaboratively developed between RDA and PRNS. This process and outcome evaluation comprises two studies, each with a specific set of evaluation questions shown in Table 4. The Implementation Study will guide the process evaluation, and the Outcome Study will guide the outcome evaluation.

Table 4. Evaluation Questions

Implementation Study Questions
1. What are the main characteristics of the program as delivered by BEST grantees?   2. What are the main outputs of service delivery?   3. What trainings are needed for the grantees to meet the program intended outcomes?   4. To what extent is the program delivered in a trauma-informed and culturally competent manner?   5. Are grantees who are implementing evidence-based programs doing so in fidelity to the model?   6. Is there racial equity in the delivery of the program?
Outcome Study Questions
1. Did program participants from PY 2022-2023 experience positive outcomes during enrollment compared to before starting the program?   2. How is the program affecting individual participants?   3. What does the self-reported data indicate about program success and outcomes? Do the participants feel their lives have been impacted by the program? How?   4. What is the level of satisfaction from the participants?   5. How does non-self-reported data demonstrate program effectiveness in meeting its intended outcomes? What is the level of effectiveness?

Implementation Study. The Implementation Study questions seek to assess the implementation of the BEST Grant Program, including what was provided, how it was provided, who was served, and how well it was provided. Question one evaluates overall program implementation, assessing who was served and what services were provided during the program year. Question two focuses on outputs of service delivery, such as the units of services provided. Question three evaluates training needs for staff in support of reaching BEST Grant Program outcomes based on identified areas for improvement. Evaluation questions four and five examine how well the program was implemented and will determine if BEST program participants were served in a manner that is trauma-informed, culturally competent, and with fidelity to the overarching BEST Grant Program model, including elements of positive youth development programming, where applicable. Finally, question six determines the extent to which services are provided equitably to participants in target populations and identified

priority neighborhoods based on their racial and ethnic identity. Findings from these evaluation questions provide lessons learned and areas for program improvement in future years for the BEST Grant Program and its grantees. By understanding the program's implementation process, we can better understand how the outcomes examined in the Outcome Study Evaluation Questions are achieved.

Outcome Study. The outcome study questions assess the overall effectiveness and impact of the BEST Grant Program and address both changes for participants overall and at the individual level. The first question explores pre and post changes in psychosocial and other positive youth development outcomes overall. Questions two and three intend to understand program impacts at the individual-level, exploring program benefits, psychosocial, and other outcomes, from the perspective of the youth participants through self-reported data. The fourth question examines how satisfied participants are with the program to contextualize observed impacts. The fifth question will leverage non-self-reported data to capture program impact and assess overall effectiveness in meeting its intended outcomes.[3]

As a single-year program evaluation, this report is best suited to examine short and medium-term outcomes occurring within one year of program completion. As such, this evaluation focused on psychosocial, employment, and education outcomes as outlined in the BEST theory of change model (see Figure 1). While these short- and medium-term outcomes should contribute to participants' longer-term outcomes, including reduced future violence and criminal legal system involvement, these cannot be directly assessed in this one-year evaluation period.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data

To assess the implementation and impact of the BEST Grant Program, RDA conducted a mixed methods process and outcome evaluation using a retrospective pre-post design to measure programmatic progress and answer the evaluation questions. This approach incorporated quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to assess the program implementation and associated impacts comprehensively. This method maximizes validity and provides different perspectives on complex, multi-dimensional issues.

RDA collected quantitative data to understand certain key elements of the BEST Grant Program service implementation and impact, such as who received these services, where they were delivered, how well services were delivered, and what outcomes they achieved. To supplement the quantitative data collection, RDA also collected qualitative data to allow for an in-depth understanding of how these services were delivered, why they achieved the outcomes they did, or how participants experienced their impact. RDA used qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate findings and deepen our understanding of them.

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[3] Due to limitations in collecting identifying participant information, this evaluation did not collect administrative data from any secondary sources.

Quantitative Data Collection. To obtain the necessary information to answer the evaluation questions, RDA worked with PRNS administrative staff to collect quantitative data from the sources listed below:

- **Grantee contracts.**
  - RDA reviewed all 14 grantee contracts for PY 2022-2023. For more information on grantees, please see Table 6 in the next section of the report.
- **Grantee participant demographics workbooks (demographic workbooks).**
  - RDA reviewed 14 year-end demographic workbooks for analysis.
- **Grantee service workbooks (service delivery workbooks).**
  - RDA reviewed 14 year-end service delivery workbooks for analysis.
- **Participant exit surveys.**
  - Due to delays in the evaluation contract, the participant surveys were only administered between March and August 2023. Grantee program staff administered participant surveys near the end of their program enrollment. This evaluation used two versions of a participant survey. The standard participant survey for participants ages 11 and older was designed as a retrospective pre-post and post-only tool and asked about a series of protective factors and participant experience in the program. The young participant survey for participants ages 10 and younger was a simplified version of the survey that focused on the participant experience. However, only the standard participant survey results were included in this evaluation report because the young participant survey was administered to youth beyond those who were enrolled in BEST programming. Therefore, the young participant survey results may not be reflective of the BEST Program and were omitted from this report. In total, 641 surveys were collected for participants ages 11 and older. See Appendix A for copies of the standard participant survey tool, for more information on the participants who took the survey, and a summary of results.
- **American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates data.**
  - Data from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables was used to identify the youth demographic statistics of the three San José zip codes from which the largest shares of participants were served: 95122, 95123, and 95111.

Qualitative Data Collection. As part of the mixed methods evaluation approach, RDA also collected qualitative data for both the Implementation Study and the Outcome Study through the following methods:

- **Site visits and observations.**
  - In May 2023, RDA conducted site visits and/or observations for seven of the 14 grantees, including Bill Wilson Center, Caminar, ConXión, Fresh Lifelines for Youth, New Hope for Youth, Shine Together, and Ujima.
- **Administrator and staff interviews and/or focus groups.**
  - In May 2023, RDA conducted in-person and virtual interviews or focus groups with program administrators and staff for 12 of the 14 grantees. In total, 47 program

administrators and staff participated in an interview or focus group. Staff from The Tenacious Group and Pacific Clinics did not participate in an interview or focus group.

- **Participant interviews and/or focus groups.**
  - o In May 2023, RDA conducted in-person and virtual focus groups with BEST participants for seven of the 14 grantees: Caminar, Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, Conxión, Fresh Lifelines for Youth, San José Jazz, Shine Together, and Ujima. In total, 45 youth and 9 parents/caregivers participated in a focus group. All participants were provided $30 gift cards for their time.

- **Youth Photovoice.**
  - o Between July and August 2023, RDA facilitated a youth photovoice project. This included an introductory photovoice session, virtual check-ins with participating youth, and a final reflection interview or focus group with youth who captured photos for the project. Twelve youth participated in the introductory photovoice session, and four youth participated in the final reflection interview or focus group. Youth who participated in the introductory session received $30 gift cards for their time, and youth who took photos and participated in the final reflection interview or focus group received $75 gift cards for their time.

Table 5 depicts the evaluation questions (by number) for the Implementation Study and Outcome Study along with the corresponding indicators and data measures and the data sources for each.

Table 5. Indicators, Data Measures, and Data Sources for Evaluation Questions

Question		Indicators & Data Measures	Data Sources
Implementation	1	Number, referral sources, and demographic characteristics of participants served	Demographic Workbooks
		Communities (participant zip codes) and target population served	Demographic Workbooks
		Number of eligible service areas provided	BEST contracts; Service Workbooks
		Program funding by eligible service areas, providers, and funding type	BEST contracts; Service Workbooks
		Program design and program delivery components	Site visits; Interviews and/or focus groups
	2	Projected and actual units of service by grantee and location	BEST contracts; Service Workbooks
		Program expenditures by providers	Service Workbooks
		Narrative descriptions of program outputs	Service Workbooks; Site visits; Interviews and/or focus groups
	3	Trainings provided and perceptions of their effectiveness	Site visits; Interviews and/or focus groups (staff and participant)
		Identified areas for improvement in service delivery to inform training needs	Site visits; Interviews and/or focus groups (staff and participant)
	4	Use of trauma-informed and culturally competent program delivery	Site visits; Interviews and/or focus groups (staff and participant)

Question		Indicators & Data Measures	Data Sources
	5	Documentation of BEST program models and use of evidence-based/-informed practices	BEST RFQs and contracts; Site visits; Interviews and/or focus groups (staff and participant)
	6	Demographic characteristics of youth and young adults (ages 6-24) living in priority neighborhoods targeted for BEST services	American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Data (2022)
		Demographic characteristics of participants served	Demographic workbooks
Outcome	1	Pre/post changes in positive youth development outcomes	Retrospective pre-post participant exit survey; Participant interviews
	2	Share of participants who reported positive outcomes	Retrospective pre-post participant exit survey; Participant interviews
		Participant perception of impact and descriptions of participant experience in the program	Participant interviews and/or focus groups; Youth photovoice; staff interviews and/or focus groups
	3	Participant reports of program successes and impact	Youth photovoice; Participant interviews and/or focus groups; staff interviews and/or focus groups
	4	Participant program satisfaction	Participant exit surveys (rated on Likert scale); Participant interviews and/or focus groups
	5	Pre/post observed changes in participants (i.e., not self-reported)	Staff interviews and/or focus groups

Analytic Strategy

Implementation Study

As outlined in Table 5, the implementation study utilized demographic and service delivery workbooks, BEST contracts, publicly available comparative data, site visits, and interviews and/or focus groups with program stakeholders.

RDA used a framework analysis approach to interpret qualitative data. To do this, RDA carefully reviewed and thematically analyzed the qualitative data, including interview and focus group transcripts and observation notes, to identify any recurring themes and key takeaways in response to the evaluation questions. Data collected in interviews and focus groups was compared across and within cases. RDA also analyzed observation, interview/focus group, and survey data for selected programs to assess trauma-informed and culturally competent service delivery as well as alignment with the BEST Grant Program model and components.

RDA utilized descriptive statistics (e.g., means, frequencies, percentages) to determine who was served by BEST during the program year, describing overall counts of participants served, their referral sources, demographic characteristics, etc. from Demographic Workbooks. Descriptive statistics of eligible service areas provided, program funding, projected and actual units of services from the

Service Delivery Workbooks also informed the specifics of what services were delivered during the program year, and how well providers met their output projections for those services. These service delivery measures are provided for the overall BEST program and disaggregated by provider and service location (e.g., school sites or police division) for sub-analyses, as appropriate.

To examine equitable racial and ethnic delivery, RDA used the most recently available American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2022) to determine the average youth population demographic characteristics of residents in the most frequently served zip codes. These characteristics were compared to the racial and ethnic identity of youth who were served by the program in the corresponding zip codes.

Outcome Study

Reporting on overall program outcomes, the outcome study utilized self-reported survey data, a youth photovoice element, and stakeholder interviews and/or focus groups. Given the timeframe for outcome study data collection relative to when youth participants completed the program, this outcome study used these data sources to understand the short- and medium-term program impacts occurring in approximately six months to a year of program participation. Outlined in BEST's Theory of Change Model (Figure 1), these short- and medium-term impacts include psychosocial, school engagement, and development outcomes. Future long-term studies that can collect data on outcomes more than a year following program participation will be better suited to examine long-term program effectiveness regarding outcomes such as educational attainment, arrest rates, convictions, and incarceration.

RDA used descriptive analyses and tests of statistical significance on individual-level retrospective pre/post participant exit survey results to measure program satisfaction as well as self-reported short- and medium-term outcomes (e.g., relationships with caring adults and peers, self-efficacy, skill development, access to opportunities, and school engagement). Aggregated descriptive analyses are reported by demographic characteristics such as race, as sample size allows.

To support meaning-making of the photovoice engagement, after youth participants took their photographs, RDA met with youth to conduct reflection interviews or focus groups. These sessions served as a space to allow the youths to analyze the photographs and allowed for conversation and feedback among the youth participants. The photographs and captions included in this report were developed and finalized by the youth participants themselves.

Limitations

As with any evaluation or research project, limitations exist. This section highlights limitations related to qualitative data collection, participant survey administration, grantee workbooks, and individual-level data collection.

Qualitative Data Collection. Although RDA made an assertive effort to speak with participants, administrators, and staff from each program, interview/focus group participation was voluntary. Therefore, while this evaluation's qualitative data collection included over 100 stakeholders, the data collected may not capture a representative collection of the views of all program administrators, staff,

and participants. Additionally, RDA made an effort to recruit youth participants for the photovoice engagement; however, the same limitations exist as participation was voluntary, and therefore, the photos and captions submitted by the four participants to this report may not be representative of all BEST youth participants.

Participant Survey Administration. RDA's contract with PRNS was finalized after the start of the program year, which led to delays in the development of the participant survey. As a result, the survey was only administered to participants between March and August 2023. Therefore, BEST participants who exited the program prior to March 2023 were not given the opportunity to complete the participant exit survey. This may impact the experiences and responses captured through the survey. Additionally, the evaluation team attempted to collect data on the specific BEST-funded program and service site location for each survey administered. However, this data was not consistently collected, and, therefore, was not available to use in analysis. Finally, as previously discussed, the young participant survey for participants ages 10 and younger was not included in this evaluation report because the young participant survey was administered to youth beyond those who were enrolled in BEST programming.

Individual Level Data Collection. Although this evaluation initially planned to collect secondary administrative data to support the Outcome Study, doing so requires identifying participant information to be collected by programs so that it can be matched to additional data sources. BEST-funded programs have maintained a preference for not reporting identifying participant information to PRNS in the grantee workbooks. As such, at the current time, it is not possible to match individual-level BEST data with any secondary, administrative sources, such as school district data. Therefore, in this report, the outcome data is limited to data collected through the participant exit surveys, participant focus groups and interviews, staff and administrator focus groups and interviews, and the youth photovoice project. Additionally, without a central system to track individual level BEST participant data across programs and from year to year, this evaluation cannot determine the extent to which participants enroll in more than one BEST-funded program, and it is difficult to confirm which participants participated in BEST programming for multiple years in a row.

Evaluation Findings

The following sections provide the key findings in the evaluation of the **BEST Grant Program for PY 2022-2023**, assessing the program's implementation and outcomes through this evaluation's two studies:

- **Implementation Study** assesses what was provided, how it was provided, who was served, and how well it was provided.

- **Outcome Study** assesses the overall effectiveness and impact on the program on participants.

Implementation Study Findings

Incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collected during PY 2022–2023, this Implementation Study Findings section explores the main characteristics of the BEST Grant Program and other areas of inquiry outlined in the evaluation plan. Specifically, findings are presented in three sections in alignment with groupings of the Implementation Study evaluation questions: (1) BEST Program Outputs, (2) BEST Program Delivery, and (3) BEST Program Administration.

BEST Program Outputs

- **What are the main outputs of service delivery?**

- **Is there racial equity in the delivery of the program?**

Key Findings – Program Outputs

- In PY 2022–2023, PRNS funded 14 agencies over $2,711,000 through the BEST Grant Program to provide services through 27 different programs or program components (programs) across the five eligible service areas (service areas): (1) personal transformation, (2) street outreach, (3) vocational, (4) family support, and (5) case management. Two grantees, New Hope for Youth and Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, received the largest grants due to supplemental one-time funding to provide additional services in specific neighborhoods with emerging needs.

- For PY 2022–2023, the BEST grantees provided 173,728 UOS, far exceeding their projected units of service (UOS) of 105,706. The majority of the UOS delivered were provided under the Personal Transformation (67,269 UOS), Street Outreach (48,802), and Case Management (48,629) service areas.

- Grantees provided more than double (284%) the projected amount of UOS in Service Area 2: Street Outreach with activities such as cold street contacts and pro-social activities.

- In PY 2022–2023, the BEST Grant Program served 3,366 unduplicated participants, almost reaching the contract goal of 3,500 participants.

- Of youth participants served in PY 2022-2023 for whom population profile data was collected, 80% exhibited characteristics that aligned with the At-Risk and High-Risk population profiles.

- BEST participants were most commonly Latinx/Hispanic (61.4%), were of high school age (31.4%) or adults (17.6%), were rarely missing school at the time of their enrollment (75.3%), and did not have a history of arrest (76%) nor an active probation or parole status (79%).

Funded Agencies and Programs

Funded Agencies. In PY 2022-2023, PRNS funded 14 agencies through the BEST Grant Program to provide services through 27 different programs or program components (programs) across the five eligible service areas (service areas): (1) personal transformation, (2) street outreach, (3) vocational, (4) family support, and (5) case management. Grantees may provide service in multiple service areas through different programs offered by their agency, such as both a life skills education program and case management services. **The majority of programs funded through the BEST Grant Program in PY 2022-2023 were funded under the Service Area 1: Personal Transformation Through Cognitive Behavioral Change and Life Skills (14 programs), followed by Service Area 5: Case Management Services (8 programs).** See Table 6 for all funded programs by service area.

Table 6. Funded Programs by Service Area, PY 2022-2023

	Personal Transformation	Street Outreach	Vocational	Family Support	Case Management
Alum Rock Counseling Center, Inc.	✓				✓
Bay Area Tutoring Association	✓				
Bill Wilson Center	✓		✓		✓
Caminar	✓			✓	✓
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	✓	✓			✓
ConXión to Community	✓		✓		
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	✓				✓
New Hope for Youth	✓	✓			✓
Pacific Clinics	✓				
San José Jazz	✓				

|	Personal Transformation	Street Outreach	Vocational	Family Support	Case Management
Shine Together	✓				✓
The Art of Yoga Project	✓				
The Tenacious Group	✓				
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	✓				✓
Total Funded Programs by Area:	14	2	2	1	8

The BEST Grant Program aims to provide gang and violence prevention and intervention services to children and young people ranging from six to 24 years of age who exhibit risk factors associated with one of the Target Population Profiles (see Table 1), ranging from At-Risk to Gang-Intentional. As a result of the BEST Grant Program's wide spectrum of its intended population and approaches there is great variance among funded programs that can be seen in the types of program activities and their intended service population.

Program Activities. The variety in program activities is especially prevalent within Service Area 1: Personal Transformation, which is the largest service area and focuses on life skills education and cognitive behavioral change. The objective of this service area is to engage youth in critical thinking and decision-making activities that result in transforming their lives. Within this service area, programs funded in PY 2022-2023 that were designed to meet this objective included the following range of activities:

- Life skills education groups and courses.
- Pro-social activities and field trips.
- African-centered youth groups.
- Overnight leadership camps.
- Yoga and creative arts classes.
- Youth support groups.
- Tutoring assistance.
- Substance use prevention education.
- Referrals to supportive services.
- Community service field trips and community service-learning projects.
- Wilderness training.
- Parent and family engagement activities.
- General music classes and after-school music education.
- Law-related education classes.
- Mentoring and coaching.
- After school centers and peer learning groups.

Intended Service Population. While the BEST Grant Program aims to serve children, youth, and young adults ages six to 24, the intended service population for each program year can vary depending on the agencies funded and the program model. For example, the Personal Transformation service area will include more prevention-focused models, which typically service younger youth, and the Street Outreach, Vocational, and Family Support service areas will typically serve older youth and their parents. For PY 2022-2023, the age of the intended service population ranges from nine to 24 years of age, depending on the grantee (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Intended Service Population, Age Ranges by Grantee
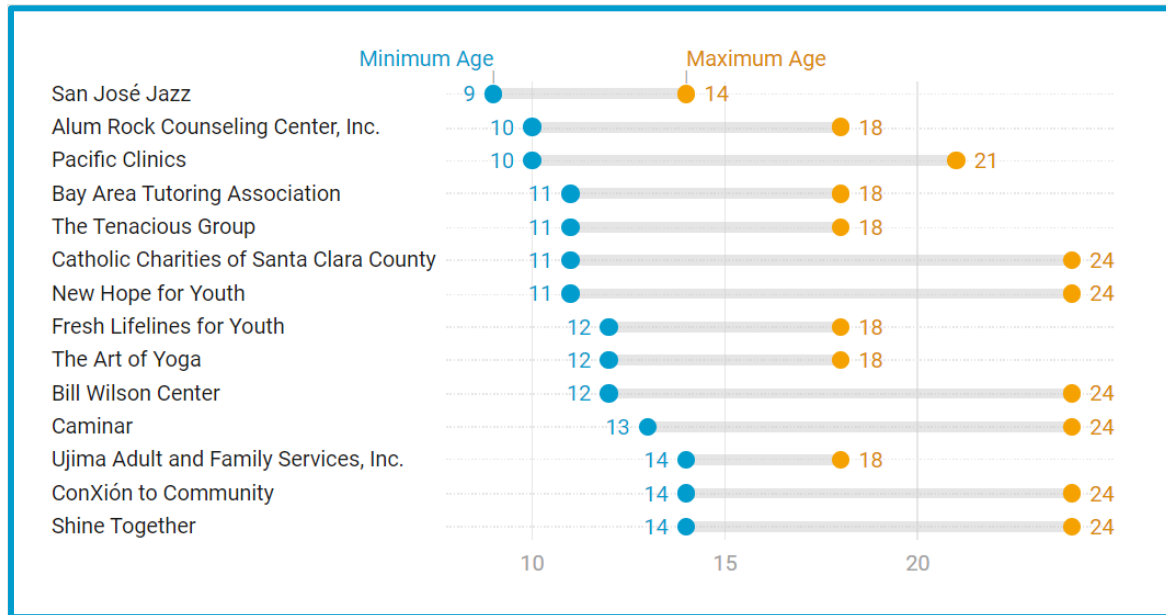
As shown in Figure 3, with the exception of the street outreach programs which are intended to focus on serving youth who may be Gang-Impacted or Gang-Intentional, the majority of programs funded across all service areas are intended to serve youth exhibiting factors associated with the High-Risk (23 programs) and Gang-Impacted (21 programs) population profiles. Eight of the 27 programs funded through BEST are intended to serve youth exhibiting factors associated with the Gang-Intentional population profile.

Figure 3. Intended Service Population, Population Profiles by Service Area
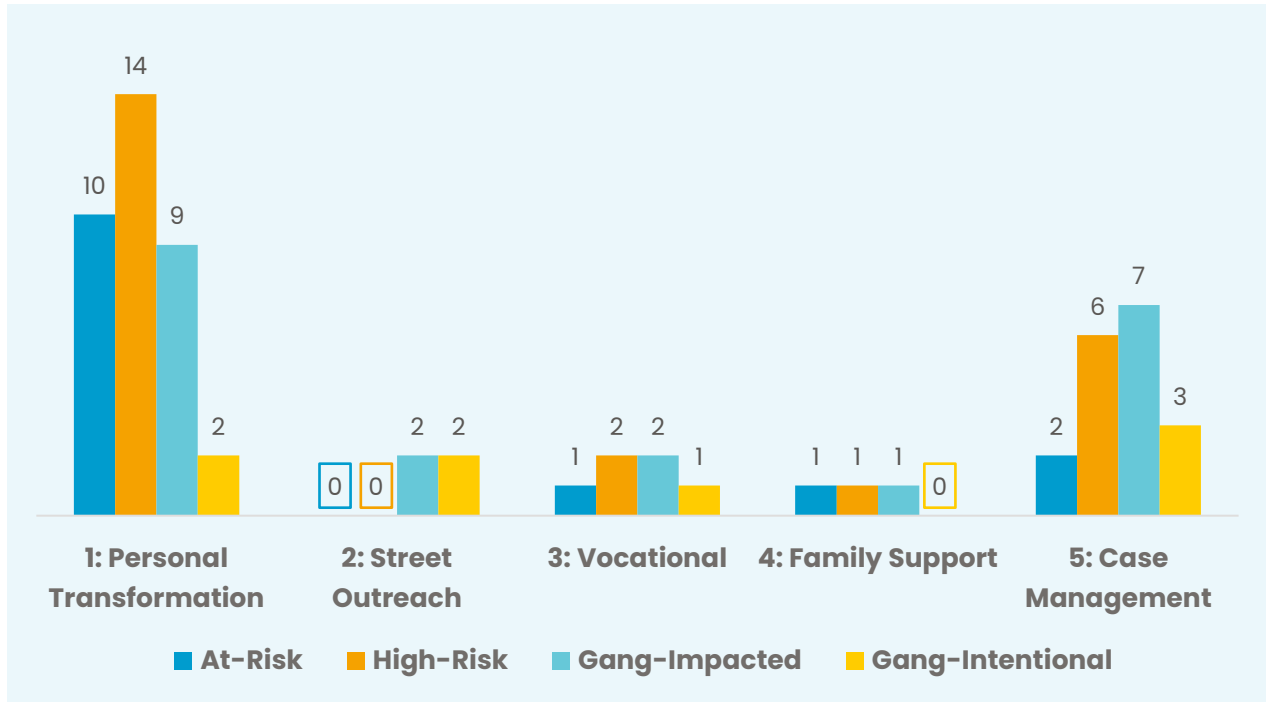
Funding

As shown in Table 7, **the BEST Grant Program granted the 14 funded agencies over $2,711,000 for PY 2022-2023.** The Personal Transformation and Case Management Service Areas accounted for nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of all BEST funds.

Two grantees, New Hope for Youth and Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, received the largest grants. In addition to the funds they received to provide programs within the eligible service areas, these two grantees received one-time funding to provide additional services in specific neighborhoods with emerging needs. Almost all grantees spent 100% of their allocated BEST funds in PY 2022-2023, with only two grantees spending below 100% of their funding: Bill Wilson Center and Caminar. Several agencies reported difficulty with hiring staff during the program year, which can contribute to unspent funds related to staff salaries when positions are unfilled.

Table 7. PY 2022–2023 BEST Funding Allocations by Service Area and Grantee

	Personal Transformation	Street Outreach	Vocational	Family Support	Case Management	Cost of Living & Partner Engagement Stipends	Other/One-Time Funding	Total
Alum Rock Counseling Center, Inc.	$32,050	–	–	–	$52,961	$7,550	–	**$92,561**
Bay Area Tutoring Association	$43,800	–	–	–	–	$6,314	–	**$50,114**
Bill Wilson Center	$50,596	–	$120,113	–	$39,534	$11,307	–	**$221,550**
Caminar	$55,291	–	–	$74,980	$97,014	$11,819	–	**$239,104**
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	$203,073	$165,088	–	–	$204,689	$22,185	$80,000	**$675,035**
ConXión to Community	$91,680	–	$38,497	–	–	$8,905	–	**$139,082**
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	$44,692	–	–	–	$36,983	$7,450	–	**$89,125**
New Hope for Youth	$80,376	$206,340	–	–	$255,840	$21,277	$140,000	**$703,833**
Pacific Clinics	$92,388	–	–	–	–	$7,772	–	**$100,160**
San José Jazz	$94,308	–	–	–	–	$7,829	–	**$102,137**
Shine Together	$12,903	–	–	–	$44,499	$6,722	–	**$64,124**
The Art of Yoga	$60,348	–	–	–	–	$6,810	–	**$67,158**
The Tenacious Group	$78,486	–	–	–	–	$7,354	–	**$85,840**
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	$38,834	–	–	–	$35,443	$7,228	–	**$81,505**
Total	**$978,825**	**$371,428**	**$158,610**	**$74,980**	**$766,963**	**$140,522**	**$220,000**	**$2,711,328**

Services Delivered

The BEST Grant Program uses a formula to measure the amount of services provided by each grantee. This formula, which uses the average number of participants, sessions, and time per session to measure service delivery, yields Units of Service (UOS).[4] This allows the BEST Grant Program to report a standardized measure of service delivery across the variety of program activities and service areas funded through the BEST Grant Program. As part of the contracting process, each grantee projects the UOS they plan to provide for the program year.

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[4] Units of Service (UOS) = Total Number of Sessions x Average Number of Participants per Session x Average Number of Hours per Session.

For PY 2022-2023, the BEST grantees provided 173,728 UOS, far exceeding their projected UOS of 105,706. This was largely driven by the Street Outreach programs (Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County and New Hope for Youth) providing greater UOS in contracted activities such as cold street contacts and pro-social activities.

As shown in Figure 4, BEST grantees provided significantly more UOS in the first three quarters of the program year and provided the fewest UOS in the final quarter of the year. Many programs offer school-based services that align with the first three quarters of the program year and offer limited or no programming during the summer months that align with the fourth quarter of the program year. While grantees exceeded the projected UOS in each service area, grantees provided more than double (284%) the projected amount of UOS in Service Area 2: Street Outreach, as shown in Figure 5. This was largely driven by the Street Outreach programs (Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County and New Hope for Youth) providing greater UOS in contracted activities such as cold street contacts and pro-social activities.

Figure 4. PY 2022-2023 Projected and Actual UOS by Quarter
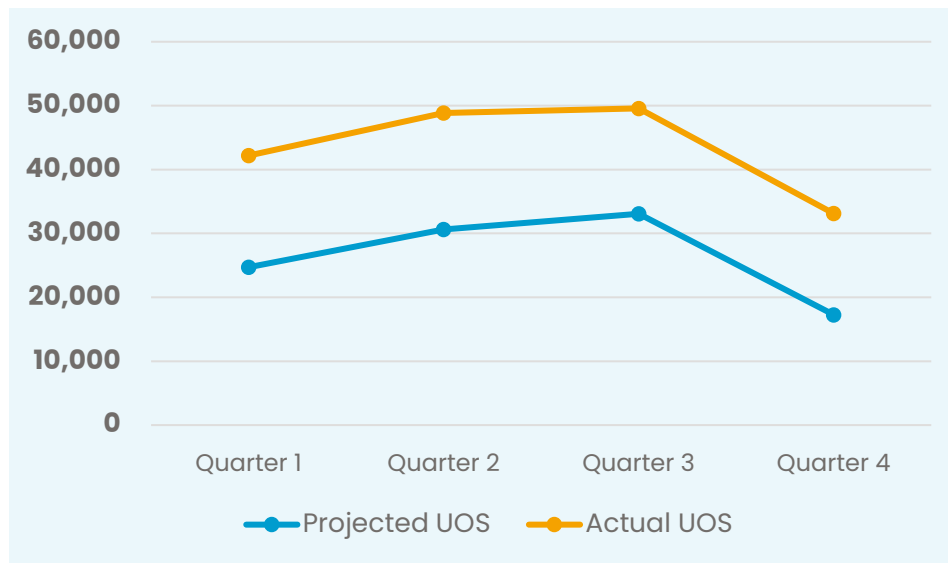
Figure 5. PY 2022–2023 Projected and Actual UOS by Service Area
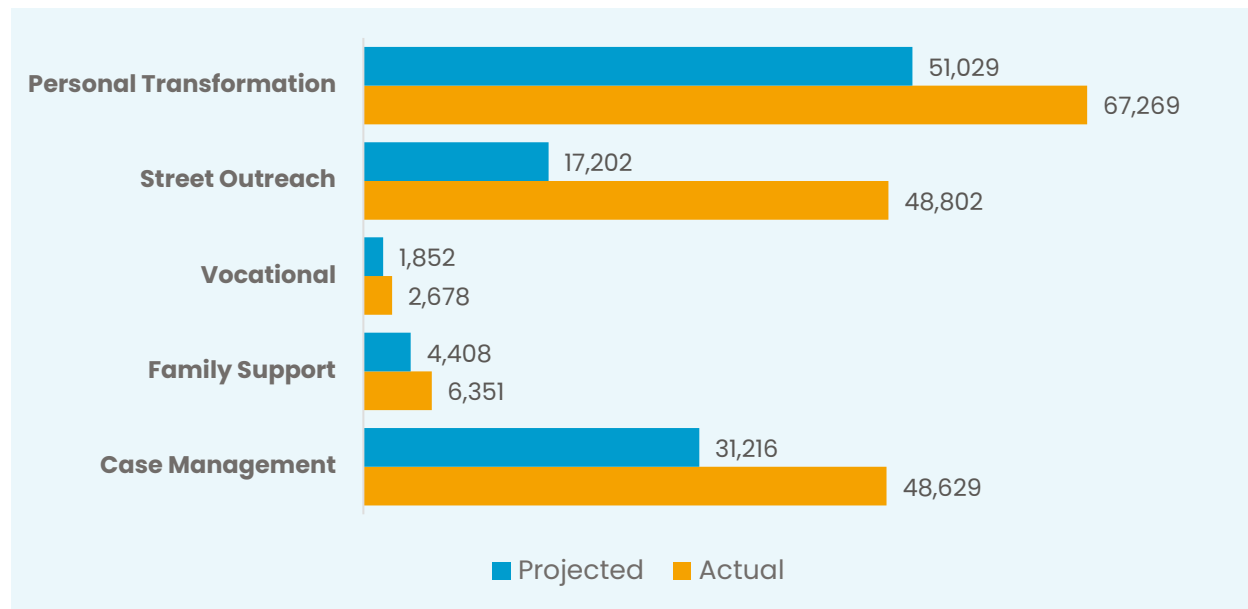
BEST services were concentrated in neighborhoods and school sites with the greatest need in San José. PRNS aims to concentrate BEST services in San José neighborhoods with higher levels of violence and a greater need for resources and services (see Table 2 for a full list of these priority neighborhoods). The school sites and community-based locations that BEST grantees are contracted to provide services correspond to these priority neighborhoods identified by PRNS. Over the course of the program year, grantees may provide more program services in an area or neighborhood, depending on the level of need in that neighborhood.

As shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7, in PY 2022-2023, the neighborhood locations that received largest concentration of site-based UOS included: Washington (11,530 UOS combined),, Santee/Phelan/Owsley (7,173 UOS combined), Buena Vista & San Carlos (5,979 UOS combined), and Fruitdale & Marlboro (5,070 UOS combined). This concentration of UOS across these neighborhoods was largely driven by services provided under the Street Outreach and Case Management service areas, with Washington receiving the most Street Outreach UOS and Fruitdale & Marlboro and Buena Vista & San Carlos receiving the most Case Management UOS.

Within many of these neighborhoods, the BEST Grant Program grantees provide services within at least 20 school sites, including elementary, middle, and high schools. The school sites with the largest concentration of service delivery during PY 2022-2023 included Yerba Buena High School (6,943 UOS), Overfelt High School (6,397 UOS), Meadows Elementary School (6,319 UOS), and Stonegate Elementary School (5,438 UOS). At these school sites, the services delivered were all funded under the Personal Transformation service area and included activities such as youth workshops, mentoring, community service-learning projects, leadership development, and music instruction.

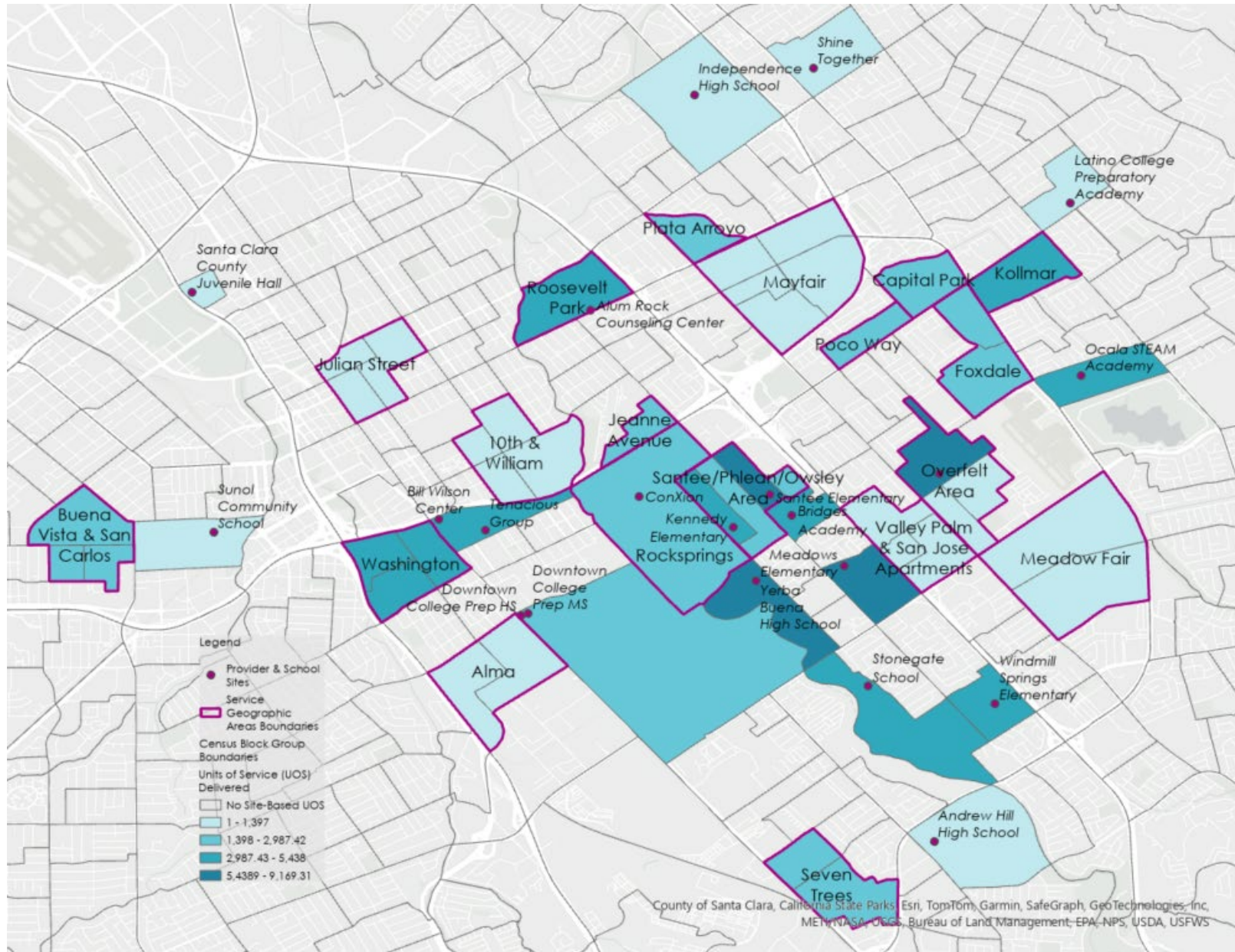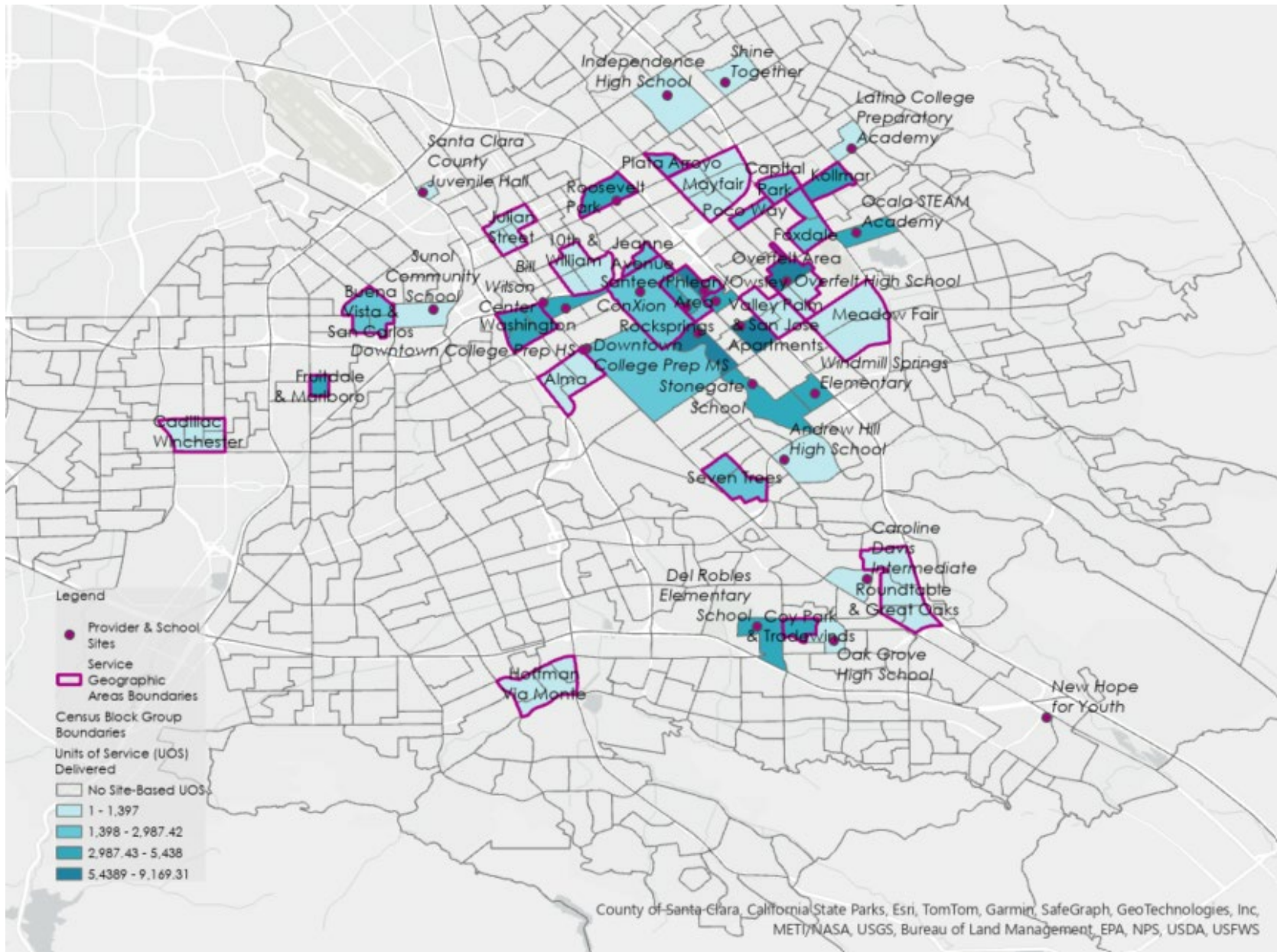**Figure 6. PY 2022-2023 UOS by Neighborhood, Inset on East San José Neighborhoods**

Figure 7. PY 2022–2023 UOS by Neighborhood

Participants Served

In PY 2022-2023, the BEST Grant Program served 3,366 unduplicated participants. BEST Grantees were contracted to provide services to 3,500 unduplicated participants across the four service areas of Personal Transformation, Vocational, Family Support, and Case Management.[5] Most grantees exceeded or nearly met their contracted goals for the unduplicated number of participants served. Two grantees, Pacific Clinics and San José Jazz, reported significantly less unduplicated participants than their contracted amount. However, this is likely due to limitations in the enrollment and demographic information collected for youth who participated in the classroom-based workshops and instruction programming provided by these two grantees. As shown in Figure 8, Caminar enrolled the most participants with 818 unduplicated participants enrolled or served in PY 2022-2023. Caminar was the only agency funded to provide services under the Family Support service area, and as such, their participant total includes 507 participants ages 27 and older.

Of the 3,366 unduplicated participants reported, at least 342 were enrolled in BEST programming prior to the beginning of PY 2022-2023 (September 1, 2022) but continued to receive services through the program year. This often occurs for participants receiving case management services as a participant who enrolls in case management near the end of one program year will likely continue working with their case manager into the new program year. Additionally, some programs enroll youth for the new program year shortly before it officially starts, such as enrolling participants in August 2022 to participate in the program year starting September 1, 2022.

As shown in Figure 9, BEST participants were most commonly referred to the program through school, largely due to the large number of programs that are provided within school settings.

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[5] Two grantees were also contracted to serve 2,450 unduplicated participants in the Street Outreach service area. Due to the nature of the Street Outreach services, enrollment and demographic information is not collected for youth who participate in these services, so any youth reached through these services are not included in the total participant count of 3,366.

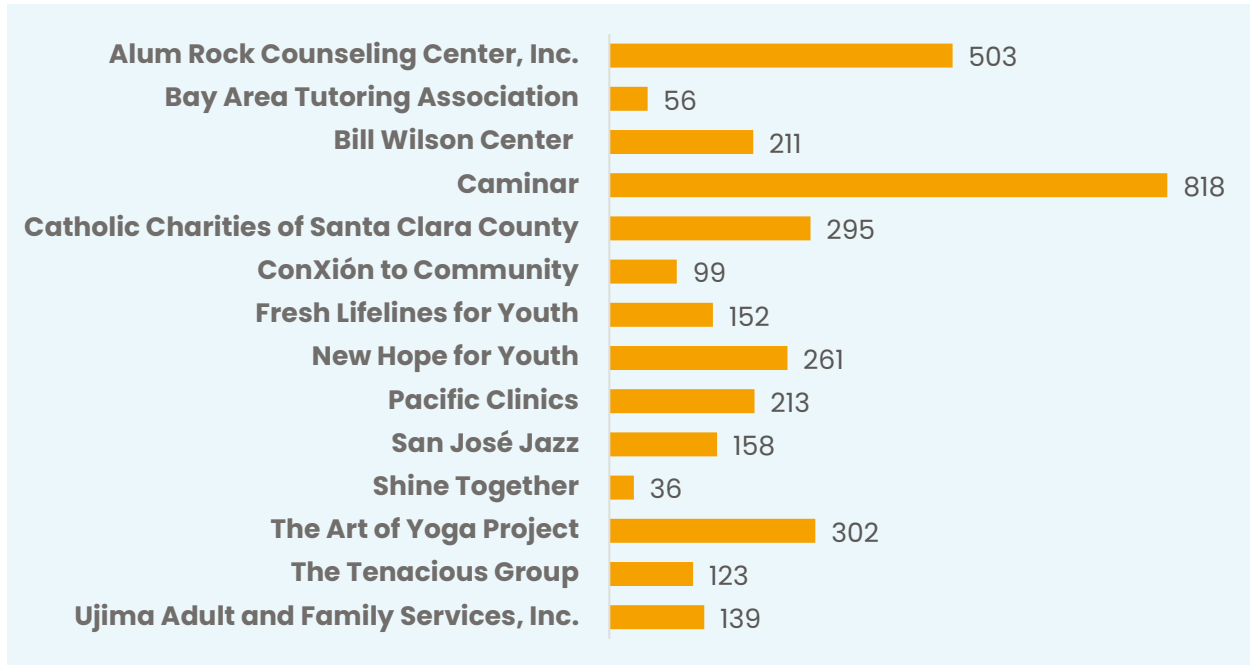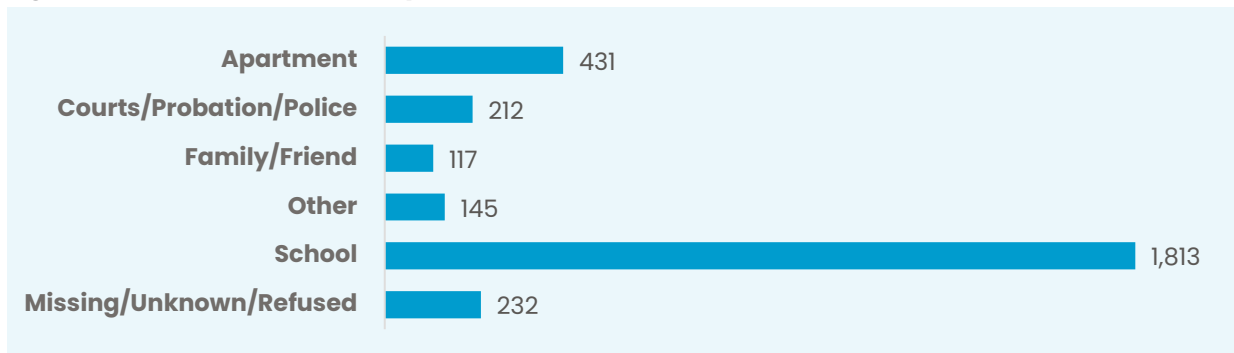*Figure 8. Unduplicated Participants Enrolled or Served in PY 2022–2023, by Grantee*

Grantee	Participants
Alum Rock Counseling Center, Inc.	503
Bay Area Tutoring Association	56
Bill Wilson Center	211
Caminar	818
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	295
ConXión to Community	99
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	152
New Hope for Youth	261
Pacific Clinics	213
San José Jazz	158
Shine Together	36
The Art of Yoga Project	302
The Tenacious Group	123
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	139

Figure 9. PY 2022–2023 Participant Referral Source[6]

Referral Source	Count
Apartment	431
Courts/Probation/Police	212
Family/Friend	117
Other	145
School	1,813
Missing/Unknown/Refused	232

As shown in Figure 10, 80% of youth participants served in PY 2022–2023 for whom population profile data was collected exhibited characteristics that aligned with the At-Risk and High-Risk population profiles.[7] Of the youth participants that each agency served, New Hope For Youth served the greatest share of youth who exhibited characteristics of the Gang-Intentional population profile (61%), while Ujima (36%), New Hope For Youth (25%), The Art of Yoga Project (25%), and Caminar (16%) served the greatest shares of participants who exhibited characteristics of the Gang-Impacted population profile (see Table 8).[8]

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[6] Some BEST-funded programs provide services at supportive housing apartment complexes, so the referral may be generated through Resident Coordinators affiliated with the apartment complex.

[7] The Figure 10 population profile does not include the risk level for individuals 27 years of age or older (n=553) or individuals with missing date of birth information (n=96).

[8] The Table 8 population profile does not include the risk level for individuals 27 years of age or older (n=553) or individuals with missing date of birth information (n=96).

Figure 10. Population Profile of BEST Youth Participants for PY 2022-2023 (n=2,085) [9]

Profile	Count
At-Risk	623
High-Risk	1,035
Gang-Impacted	264
Gang-Intentional	163
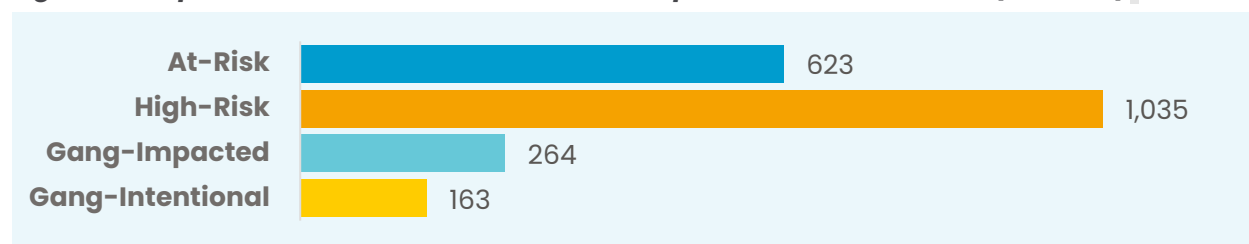
At the start of each program year, grantees specify in their contracts which population profiles they intend to serve (e.g., At-Risk, High-Risk, Gang-Impacted, and/or Gang-Intentional). The majority of grantees served participants who aligned with their intended population profiles. Three grantees—Alum Rock Counseling Center, Fresh Lifelines for Youth, and San José Jazz—intended to also serve youth who exhibited characteristics of the Gang-Impacted profile but only served youth who aligned with the At-Risk or High-Risk profiles (see Table 8). Grantee staff noted that while their programs can be designed to serve youth from the intended population profiles, who they serve depends on the referrals they receive in a program year.

Table 8. Population Profile of BEST Youth Participants Served by Grantee for PY2022-2023[10]

	At-Risk	High-Risk	Gang-Impacted	Gang-Intentional	Missing/ Unknown / Refused
Alum Rock Counseling Center, Inc.	16%	7%	–*	–	76%
Bay Area Tutoring Association	62%	38%	–	–	–
Bill Wilson Center	–	94%	6%	–	–
Caminar	39%	45%	16%	–	–
*Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County***	20%	20%	30%	30%	
ConXión to Community	19%	67%	5%	8%	–
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	57%	43%	–	–	–
New Hope for Youth	6%	7%	25%	61%	–
Pacific Clinics	52%	48%	–	–	–
San José Jazz	100%	–	–	–	–
Shine Together	67%	19%	–	–	14%
The Art of Yoga Project	–	75%	25%	–	–
The Tenacious Group	–	94%	6%	–	–
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	11%	53%	36%	–	–

* Highlighted cells denote service population categories in which grantees did not serve any youth who exhibited characteristics that aligned with that category (or did not collect this information) but that grantees intended to serve based on their PY 2022-2023 contract.

** Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County did not report individual-level risk level data for the youth they served. Instead, Catholic Charities reported aggregate assessment data to PRNS. As a result, the youth served by Catholic Charities are not reflected in any table or figure that uses individual-level risk level data, such as Table 9.

[9] Youth participant population profile data was missing or not collected for 632 (23%) of the 2,717 participants under the age of 27.

[10] Table 8 does not include risk level data for youth served through Street Outreach programs as no intake is completed for these youth.
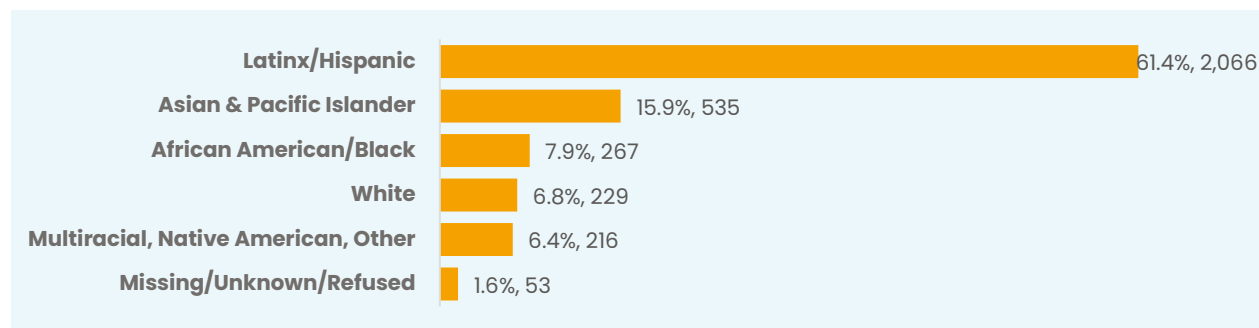
Shown in Table 9, boys and young men exhibited characteristics of the Gang-Impacted and Gang-Intentional population profile at a rate almost three-times higher than girls and young women.[11] While 23% of boys and young men served through BEST exhibited these Gang-Impacted and Gang-Intentional characteristics, just 8% of girls and young women exhibited the same. Instead, the majority (71%) of girls and young women served exhibited characteristics of the At-Risk and High-Risk population profile.

Table 9. Population Profile of BEST Youth Participants Served by Gender Identity for PY2022-2023

	At-Risk	High-Risk	Gang-Impacted	Gang-Intentional	Missing/Unknown/Refused
Boy or young man	19%	33%	13%	10%	25%
Girl or young woman	27%	44%	6%	2%	21%
Transgender/Nonbinary Youth	16%	74%	11%	–	–
Missing/Unknown/Refused	53%	29%	6%	3%	9%

BEST participants were most commonly Latinx/Hispanic and of high school age or adults. As shown in Figure 11, more than half (61.4%) of participants identified as Latinx/Hispanic, and as shown in Figure 12, the BEST Grant Program served slightly more girls and women (49.7%). Most programs served middle to high school age participants (from 12 to 18 years old), and Caminar, the one grantee funded under Service Area 4: Family Support, served 507 adults ages 27 or older (see Figure 13).

Figure 11. PY 2022-2023 BEST Participant Race/Ethnicity (n=3,366)

Latinx/Hispanic — 61.4%, 2,066
Asian & Pacific Islander — 15.9%, 535
African American/Black — 7.9%, 267
White — 6.8%, 229
Multiracial, Native American, Other — 6.4%, 216
Missing/Unknown/Refused — 1.6%, 53

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[11] The Table 9 population profile does not include the risk level for individuals 27 years of age or older (n=553) or individuals with missing date of birth information (n=96).
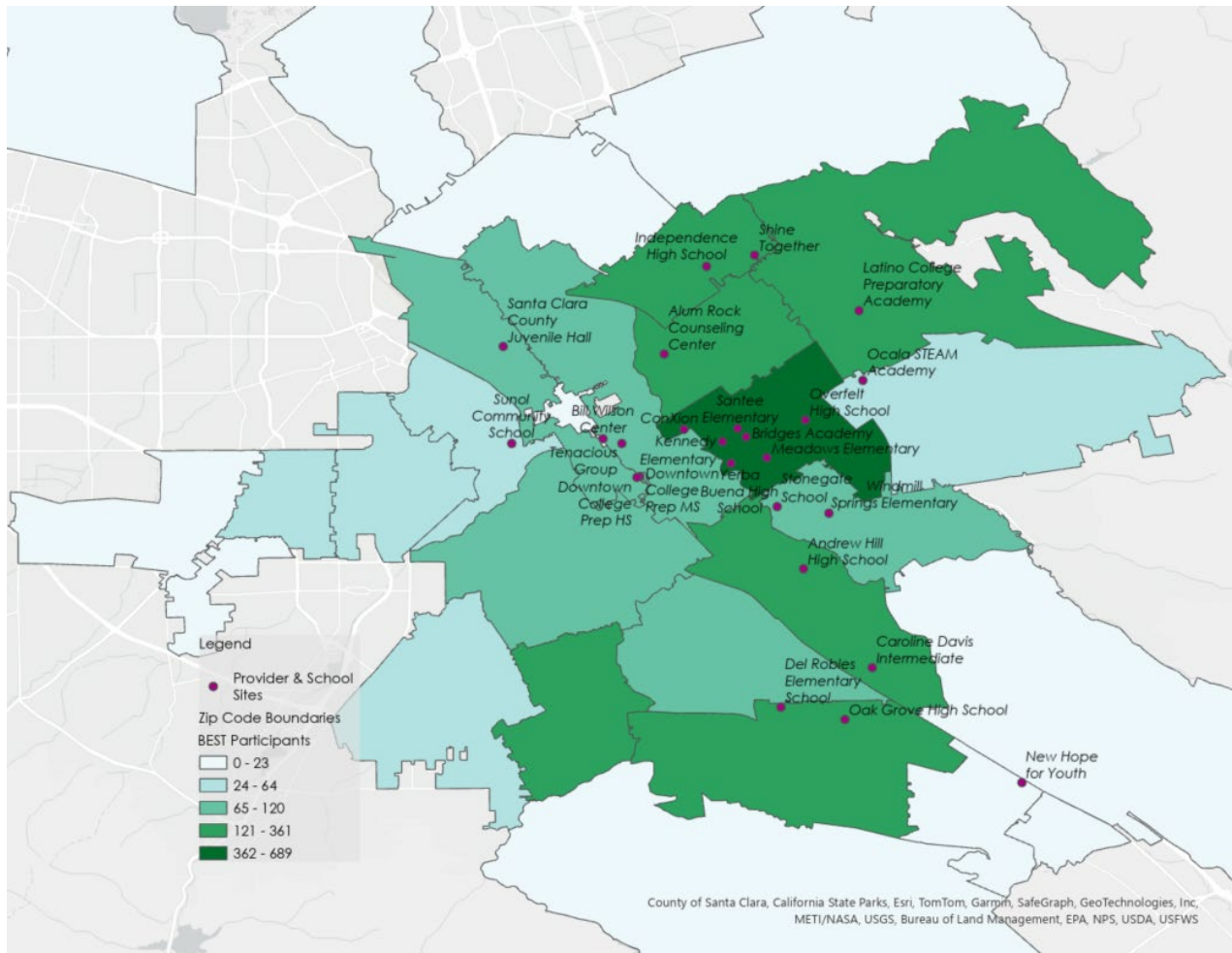
Figure 12. PY 2022–2023 BEST Participant Gender (n=3,366)

Girl or Woman	49.7%, 1,674
Boy or Man	48.1%, 1,620
Missing/Unknown/Refused	1.6%, 53
Transgender/Non-binary	0.6%, 19
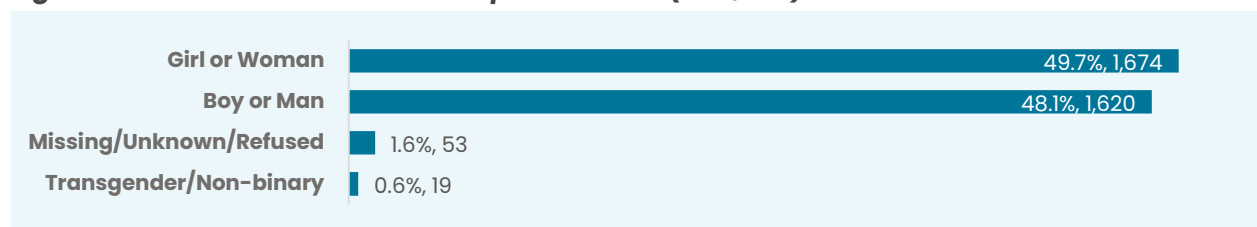
Figure 13. PY 2022–2023 BEST Participant Age (n=3,366)

11 & Under	11.0%, 370
12–14	26.6%, 895
15–18	31.4%, 1,057
18–24	10.5%, 353
25–26	1.2%, 42
27+	16.4%, 553
Missing/Unknown/Refused	2.9%, 96

As shown in Table 10, some programs (Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, New Hope for Youth, Shine Together, and The Tenacious Group) predominantly serve Latinx/Hispanic youth, while others have greater variation in the youth population they serve. San José Jazz (31%), Alum Rock Counseling Center (20%), The Art of Yoga Project (18%), Caminar (17%), and Bay Area Tutoring Association (16%) served the greatest share of Asian and Pacific Islander youth, and Bill Wilson Center (54%) and Pacific Clinics (21%) served the greatest share of White youth.

Table 10. PY 2022–2023 BEST Youth Participant Race/Ethnicity by Grantee (n=2,717)

	African American /Black	Asian & Pacific Islander	Latinx/ Hispanic	Multiracial, Native American, Other	White	Missing/ Unknown/ Refused
Alum Rock Counseling Center, Inc.	1%	20%	71%	6%	1%	–
Bay Area Tutoring Association	–	16%	44%	35%	5%	–
Bill Wilson Center	23%	4%	–	13%	54%	6%
Caminar	6%	17%	68%	4%	5%	–
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	3%	6%	88%	2%	2%	–
ConXión to Community	1%	7%	71%	18%	2%	–
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	3%	5%	60%	13%	–	19%
New Hope for Youth	4%	6%	87%	2%	1%	1%
Pacific Clinics	6%	5%	54%	14%	21%	–
San José Jazz	1%	31%	56%	10%	3%	–
Shine Together	–	–	89%	8%	3%	–
The Art of Yoga Project	8%	18%	71%	6%	1%	–
The Tenacious Group	1%	8%	90%	1%	1%	–
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	87%	1%	–	12%	–	–

Figure 14. PY 2022–2023 Zip Code of Residence for BEST participants by Neighborhood

As shown in Table 10, some programs (Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, New Hope for Youth, Shine Together, and The Tenacious Group) predominantly serve Latinx/Hispanic youth, while others have greater variation in the youth population they serve. San José Jazz (31%), Alum Rock Counseling Center (20%), The Art of Yoga Project (18%), Caminar (17%), and Bay Area Tutoring Association (16%) served the greatest share of Asian and Pacific Islander youth, and Bill Wilson Center (54%) and Pacific Clinics (21%) served the greatest share of White youth.

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Bill Wilson Center	23%	4%	–	13%	54%	6%
Caminar	6%	17%	68%	4%	5%	–
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	3%	6%	88%	2%	2%	–
ConXión to Community	1%	7%	71%	18%	2%	–
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	3%	5%	60%	13%	–	19%
New Hope for Youth	4%	6%	87%	2%	1%	1%
Pacific Clinics	6%	5%	54%	14%	21%	–
San José Jazz	1%	31%	56%	10%	3%	–
Shine Together	–	–	89%	8%	3%	–
The Art of Yoga Project	8%	18%	71%	6%	1%	–
The Tenacious Group	1%	8%	90%	1%	1%	–
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	87%	1%	–	12%	–	–

As shown in Figure 14, BEST participants resided in zip codes across San José, but the three zip codes with the most participants served were 95122, 95111, and 95123. In all three of these zip codes, the BEST Grant Program served a larger proportion of Latinx/Hispanic participants compared to the average youth population (ages 0-24) of the zip code (see Table 11). Comparatively, the share of Asian or Pacific Islander youth served in the 95122 and 95123 zip codes (12%) is just half of their overall share of the youth population in those zip codes (ranging from 24% to 27%). In the 95111 zip code, the share of Asian or Pacific Islander youth served by the BEST Grant program (21%) was closer to their overall share in the youth population (28%).

Table 11. Ethnicity Comparison Between BEST Youth Participants and General Youth Population (ages 0-24) by Zip Code

		Latinx/Hispanic	Non-Latinx/Hispanic
95111	Population (n=20,640)	60%	40%
	BEST (n=346)	64%	36%
95122	Population (n=18,588)	67%	33%
	BEST (n=483)	78%	22%
95123	Population (n=21,726)	39%	61%
	BEST (n=230)	53%	47%

As previously discussed, some programs largely focus on serving Latinx/Hispanic youth, and the BEST Grant Program overall has historically served a large share of Latinx/Hispanic youth as these youth have historically comprised a large share of the priority neighborhoods in which BEST aims to provide services. However, over the last decade, the Asian and Pacific Islander population has been the fastest growing racial/ethnic identity in Santa Clara County, increasing to 41.1% of the County's population in 2022 from 32.5% in 2010.[12] Since PY 2016-2017, the share of Asian and Pacific Islander youth served by the BEST Grant Program has increased from 6% to a current average of 15% over the last four program years (since PY 2019-2020). While several BEST-funded agencies are serving a larger share of Asian and Pacific Islander youth and many have hired Asian or Pacific Islander staff to reflect their changing participant population, there may be a need for the BEST Grant Program to continue to expand and tailor its services to a growing Asian and Pacific Islander youth population.

In general, BEST participants were rarely missing school at the time of their enrollment and a small share had a history of justice system involvement prior to enrolling. In addition to demographic information, through the use of a standard intake form, BEST-funded programs collect other information to better understand the characteristics and needs of the BEST service population. This includes information on school attendance and their history of justice system involvement. Of the 3,366 participants, 769 were not currently attending school, and as shown in Figure 15, of those attending school, BEST participants most commonly reported rarely missing school (n=1,398).

Figure 15. PY 2022-2023 BEST Participant Rates of Absenteeism at Intake (n=1,857)[13]
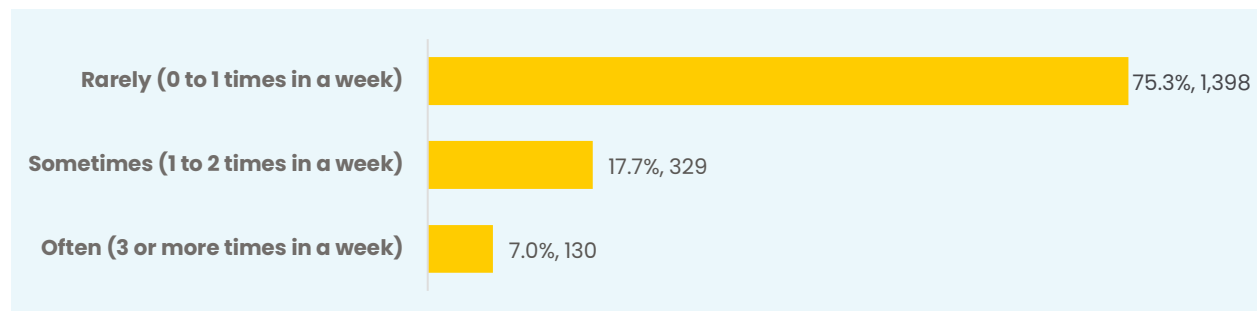
Justice system involvement data was not consistently collected across youth participants at the time of intake, with data reported as missing, unknown, or refused for 1,561 of the 2,717 youth participants. Some programs do not collect justice system involvement data for youth at intake due to the risk that they will have their files audited or subpoenaed by authorities, and they do not wish to have that information documented for the youth they serve. Additionally, BEST-

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[12] USA Facts – *Our Changing Population: Santa Clara County, California.* Retrieved 2/7/2024 from **https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/population-and-demographics/our-changing-population/state/california/county/santa-clara-county/**.
[13] Absenteeism at Intake data was missing or not collected for 740 (25%) of the 2,597 unduplicated participants reported who were attending school at the time of intake.

funded programs take a strengths-based approach to services, especially case management services, and the justice system involvement history of youth may not be perceived as helpful in informing a strengths-based service delivery plan. Of those for whom justice system involvement data was collected, a small share of participants reported being actively on probation or parole at intake (21%, n=238) or having ever been arrested (24%, n=272).

Figure 16. PY 2022-2023 BEST Participant Justice System Involvement at Intake

Arrest (n=1,156)

- 24% History of Arrest
- 76% No History of Arrest

Missing Data n=1,561

Probation or Parole (n=1,156)

- 21% On Probation or Parole
- 79% Not on Probation or Parole

Missing Data n=1,561
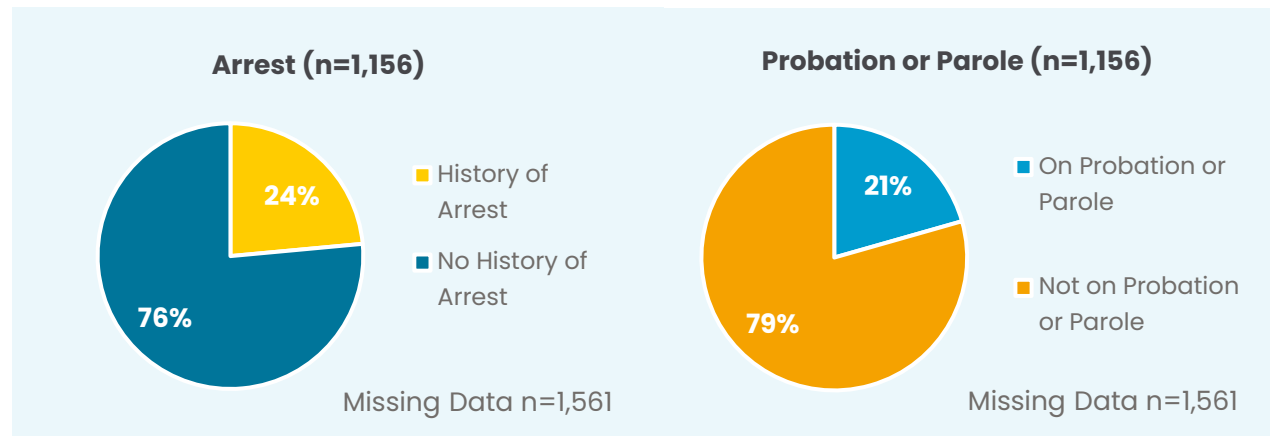
BEST Program Delivery

- **What are the main characteristics of the program as delivered by BEST grantees?**

- **To what extent is the program delivered in a trauma-informed and culturally competent manner?**

- **Are grantees who are implementing evidence-based programs doing so in fidelity to the model?**

To assess the main characteristics of the BEST programs as delivered by the grantees, including the extent to which they were delivered in a trauma-informed and culturally competent manner and if programs were implemented in alignment with the model, we:

- Asked programs and youth specifically about program components that are critical to the overarching BEST Program model, including: the assessment of youth entering the program, engagement of family members in addition to enrolled youth, and referrals to other services and resources outside the BEST program.

- Asked programs to identify examples of how their service delivery model includes trauma-informed and culturally competent practices and asked youth about their experience in the program and noted applied practices during on-site observations.

- Assessed program responses, program observations, and youth survey responses holistically against a framework of positive youth development principles.

The following subsections provide an overview of the findings for each of the following areas: (1) Assessment Processes, (2) Family Engagement, (3) Referrals to Other Services, (4) Trauma-Informed and Culturally Competent Practices, and (5) Alignment with Positive Youth Development Principles.

Key Findings – Program Delivery

- **Assessments.** In alignment with the BEST Grant Program model-promoted principle to target interventions based on assessment results, funded programs that have assessment processes reported using assessment results to inform their service delivery approach.

- **Family Engagement.** While only one program was specifically funded under Service Area 4: Family Support, in alignment with the BEST model's whole family approach, many programs reported various ways in which they engage family

members of youth participants in services and program activities. This ranged from sharing information with family members to taking a whole-family approach to case management.

- **Referrals to Outside Services.** Most programs work to connect youth and their families to outside services as needed but many described the challenges they face when making referrals, including limited resources available to meet the community's needs and accessibility barriers (e.g., language, eligibility criteria, transportation, etc.). Despite these challenges, 85.6% of surveyed participants reported that they knew about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to them after participating in the BEST Grant Program.

- **Trauma-Informed and Culturally Competent Practices.** Most programs reported using trauma-informed and culturally competent practices in their service delivery approach, but fewer programs reported specific training for staff in this area, with many expressing a desire for trauma-informed and cultural competency training to be offered through the BEST Grant Program. A vast majority of youth survey respondents reported positive experiences in BEST-funded programs related to the use of these practices (e.g., feeling respected by staff, feeling heard, feeling safe in the program, feeling staff understand their identity, and language accessibility of services). However, youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian reported statistically significantly less positive experiences on these measures and youth who identified as girls or women generally reported more positive experiences.

- **Alignment with Positive Youth Development Principles.** Overall, BEST-funded programs implement their programs in alignment with the principles of positive youth development programming that support healthy youth development. This includes creating environments that promote safety, provide developmentally appropriate structure and tailored activities, encourage positive social norms, provide opportunities for skill development, promote the development of supportive relationships and offer inclusive spaces and opportunities for youth to belong. For example, 85.2% of surveyed participants reported that they always or often learned new skills that were helpful to them, and 90.2% reported that there was always or often an adult in the program who cared about them. Also in alignment with positive youth development principles, many BEST Programs employ strategies to incorporate multiple systems of support for the youth they serve, including family, school, and community systems. However, some programs noted how this can be challenging and many see opportunities for growth in developing a community-wide system of support for youth.

Assessment Processes

The BEST Grant Program model promotes the use of the Evidence-Based Principles of Effective Interventions[14] amongst grantee programs which includes principles to assess actuarial risks and needs of participants and target interventions based on those assessments. This means that, in practice, BEST Program grantees who provide services and programs in applicable areas should implement an assessment process that identifies the risk behaviors and strengths exhibited by participants. Then, programs should tailor programming to each individual by focusing high-intensity services on participants with a higher level of risk and need and individualize services so that they address participants' needs and are responsive to their individual characteristics, such as gender, level of motivation, or developmental stage.

Evaluation Findings

Most programs complete an assessment with enrolling youth as part of the intake process, but the processes and tools used vary across programs.

As previously discussed, BEST-funded programs provide a wide variety of activities and services across the prevention and intervention spectrum. While most programs use an assessment process to help identify areas of strength and needed support for participants, at least two programs that are prevention-focused and that provide services with a lower level of intensity reported not using an assessment with participants.

Programs that reported completing an assessment with participants use a variety of tools, such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS); program-developed tools based on existing tools such as the CANS, Self Sufficiency Matrix, and the BEST Target Population Profiles; and validated instruments related to a program's service area. Across these tools, the main areas of focus include areas of support/need, protective factors, recidivism risk, school, family and home situation, nutrition, bullying, mental well-being, access to activities, and the impact of gang association. Although programs reported using a variety of tools, many program staff shared similar assessment approaches, including:

- Approaching the assessment as a conversation with participants and creating space to build rapport with participants before asking personal questions.

- Incorporating home visits, environment scans, and/or assessments of the parents/guardians into the process.

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[14] National Institute of Corrections and the Crime and Justice Institute – *Implementing evidence-based practice in community corrections: The principles of effective intervention.* 2003. Retrieved 12/11/2023 from **https://nicic.gov/resources/nic-library/all-library-items/implementing-evidence-based-practice-community-corrections**.

- Generally using assessment results for a full year of services but sometimes reassessing after three or six months as needed.

Programs with assessment processes reported using assessment results to inform their service delivery approach, generally in alignment with the BEST Grant Program model-promoted principle to target interventions based on assessments. This helps to ensure that the services and resources provided, approach, and intensity of the services provided best meet the needs, strengths, and other characteristics of youth participants. Examples of how programs reported using assessment results to inform their service delivery included:

- Creating service delivery plans based on the youth needs.

- Identifying what motivates the youth in making certain decisions and what skills staff can support the youth in developing.

- Identifying which group services offered through the program would be beneficial to the youth.

- Identifying referrals to other services or resources that would be beneficial for the youth and/or their family.

- Identifying what services or supports the youth is already receiving through other organizations or programs, such as school, mental health, or other community-based services, to not over-service the youth.

- Determining the intensity at which to work with youth (e.g., engaging youth with a higher level of need more frequently or for longer sessions than youth with a lower level of need).

Looking Forward

While some prevention-focused programs that work with a population with lower need levels may not require a full assessment to inform service delivery, the lack of a standardized assessment tool can make it difficult to determine the characteristics of the children, youth, and young people being served through the BEST Grant Program and if programs are reaching the intended service population. For PY 2023-2024 across programs serving high-school age or older youth, the BEST Grant Program will be using a standardized risk-level tool to measure how the youth served through each funded program align with the BEST Grant Program's intended service population profiles. This will help the BEST Grant Program determine if the youth with higher levels of need are being served by the programs intended for a higher-need youth population, such as case management programs, but it will not assess all youth served by the BEST Grant Program. However, this standardized tool was designed for use with youth ages 11 or older, and therefore, would not be appropriate to use with programs that serve youth age 10 or younger. For programs that serve the youngest BEST participants (ages 6-10), PRNS should review funded programs to determine which of these programs are providing primary

prevention services. As primary prevention services are mainly targeted to serve a wider reach of youth in communities needing resources and services, a risk-level tool for these programs would have less impact in informing service delivery as services are likely not targeted to address specific youth risks and needs. If PRNS identifies programs serving youth ages 6-10 years old that are providing more intensive services (i.e., not primary prevention services), it should consider implementing a developmentally appropriate version of the risk-level tool with these programs.

Family Engagement

In addition to promoting the development of protective factors in children, youth, and young adults, the BEST Grant Program also aims to cultivate supportive parent/caregiver-child relationships, increase access to services and resources, and increase parental/caregiver involvement in their children's life and development. The BEST Grant Program does this through Service Area 4: Family Support and by encouraging programs funded under other service areas to take a whole-family approach and engage family members in service delivery whenever possible and appropriate.

Evaluation Findings

The BEST Grant Program funded one program under Service Area 4: Family Support in PY 2022-2023, and this program provided a parenting training course that family members found helpful in further developing their parenting skills.

The Service Area 4: Family Support program offered a small group, welcoming setting where parents and caregivers could gather to learn about parenting related topics and learn about relevant resources. Parent and caregiver participants in this program who participated in a focus group for the evaluation shared how helpful they found the program. Specifically, they appreciated how they learned about new parenting-related topics, such as communication, child development, and helpful resources. They also expressed how the program created a space in which they could learn from each other's experiences.

> "We as parents didn't all grow up in a healthy way, and sometimes we don't know what's healthy so, we're trying to stop that and start something better."
>
> - Parent/Caregiver Participant

> "I have 3 kids in their teenage years, and it's the hardest. I consider myself a good parent, but even if you're a good parent there are things you can learn."
>
> - Parent/Caregiver Participant

While only one program was specifically funded under Service Area 4: Family Support, in alignment with the BEST model's whole family approach, many programs reported various ways in which they engage family members of youth participants in services and program activities.

Direct family engagement in program services from the BEST Grant Program's other service areas ranged from basic engagement, such as sharing written program information with the family during the enrollment process or providing family members with updates during service delivery, to taking a whole-family approach to case management. Programs that engage family members in case management services reported doing so by connecting families to needed resources, working on service plan goals related to the family unit, or including family members in coaching sessions. More than one program noted that when there is a focus on making the youth's family unit better, that generally results in a better outcome for the youth. However, this type of goal is not possible for all youth as many come into BEST programming without a family-based support system. In these cases, programs aim to build up other systems and communities of support for the young person.

Outside of whole-family case management services, programs most commonly discussed engaging families through pro-social or community events that create spaces for family bonding opportunities or providing resources to families, such as parenting classes outside of the BEST Grant Program, food, rental assistance, immigration services, or clinical services. Some programs noted how it can be challenging to engage families in service delivery when family members have very busy schedules and may be working multiple jobs due to the high cost of living in San José.

Looking forward

With the goal of increasing family engagement and support across more components of the program, the BEST Grant Program revised the service areas for PY 2023-2024 to include a whole-family approach subset to the Case Management Intervention Service Area. The whole-family case management area will seek to strengthen families and their core capabilities so that both adults and children flourish in all aspects of their lives through a family-led case management strategy.

Referrals to Other Services

As a program that spans prevention and intervention services with a wide-ranging intended service population, the BEST Grant Program can enroll children, youth, and families who could benefit from additional services, resources, or opportunities that are not offered by BEST-funded programs. Through its variety of individual, school-based, and community services, the BEST Grant Program can act as an entry point or connection point to these additional services for many youths and families.

Evaluation Findings

Most programs work to connect youth and their families to outside services when a need is identified, but programs reported leveraging different avenues and networks to make those connections.

In PY 2022-2023, 10 of the 14 funded agencies were contracted to provide referrals to other services, provide case management, or a combination of both. Funded agencies reported that the most common referrals they made for youth and families included food and basic needs, mental health, housing, substance use, career/employment services, education, immigration, pregnancy resources or child support, and tattoo removal.

Some funded agencies offer other programs through their agency and can often easily connect youth or families to these additional services offered. For example, Fresh Lifelines for Youth offers Career Pathway Navigators to support youth career services, ConXión is a one-stop-shop Family Resource Center, and Bill Wilson Center offers clinical mental health services. Some school-based BEST programs reported working with school social workers and wellness center staff when a need is identified with a BEST participant, so as not to duplicate referral systems within the school. Additionally, many BEST programs have built strong networks for community referrals and leverage these relationships to connect their participants to helpful resources and services. These networks require frequent information sharing to maintain accurate information and points of contact. Many programs noted that the Alliance Tech Team meetings are a helpful venue for resource sharing and supporting these referral networks. However, some BEST agencies expressed a desire to have an available resource with more accurate and updated referral information.

Even with strong referral networks, agencies described challenges in connecting youth and their families to needed services. These included limited resources available in the community, such as mental health services, housing resources—especially emergency housing and housing for pregnant youth—resources for youth leaving domestic violence situations, and funds available for cash assistance or economic relief. Staff also expressed how eligibility criteria for services can be limiting and ensuring that youth are able to access and use referred services can be difficult due to barriers like transportation, having the right insurance, language accessibility, and required documentation.

Despite these challenges, many BEST youth participants reported an increase in their knowledge of beneficial resources and opportunities after participating in the BEST Grant Program. Of the PY 2022-2023 BEST participants ages 11 or older who were surveyed, 85.6% (n=522) responded that it was somewhat true or very true that they knew about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to them, almost twice as many compared to only 43.3%(n=270) who responded the same before participating in the BEST program (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): I know/knew about other resources or opportunities that can/could be helpful to me.
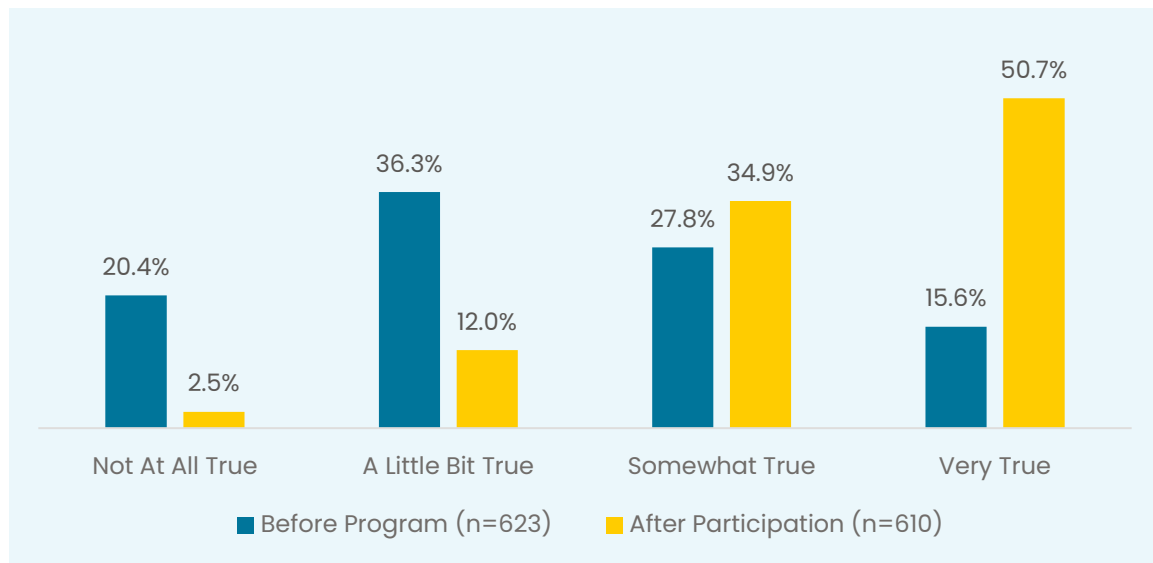
Many participants also see BEST-funded programs as an opportune connection point to other services and resources with several focus group participants sharing that they would like to have access to additional resources and opportunities. More specifically, youth wanted more internship/fellowship opportunities, more non-profit networking and forums, and stronger connections between BEST agencies and other non-profits.

Looking Forward

While the BEST Grant Program collects service delivery data related to time spent making referrals for contract monitoring purposes, it has not previously collected data on what types of referrals are being made through BEST-funded programs. For PY 2023-2024, the BEST Grant Program plans to begin collecting referral type data from funded programs. This will allow the BEST Grant Program and PRNS to better identify the needs of children, youth, and family participants in the BEST Grant Program and to facilitate stronger referral systems between BEST agencies and other City or county-level services and resources.

Trauma-Informed and Culturally Competent Practices

Across all service areas, the BEST Grant Program aims to fund programs that take a strengths-based approach, that provide a safe space for children and youth, and that are culturally competent, gender responsive, and multilingual, where appropriate. By funding programs that are trauma-informed and culturally competent, the BEST Grant Program aims to help ensure that the services provided through funded programs are effective, responsive, and appropriate for all participants no matter their prior experiences or characteristics.

Evaluation Findings

Most programs reported using trauma-informed practices in their service delivery approach, but fewer programs reported specific training for staff in this area, with many expressing a desire for trauma-informed training to be offered through the BEST Grant Program.

Examples of trauma-informed practices used by programs included:

- Emphasis on respectful choice and participant autonomy.

- Use of invitational language to participate in program activities.

- Focus on participant emotional health and safety and creating safe, welcoming spaces.

- Use of restorative justice principles, non-punitive conflict mediation, and non-violent communication.

- Recognizing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and adjusting service delivery as needed.

- Creating spaces for youth-led groups, activities, and case management planning.

- Incorporating regular physical regulation check-ins to programming to allow youth to recognize and process their body's own physical responses and sensations through guided meditation.

- Drafting and implementing safety plans.

- Creating support networks for staff.

Consistent with the use of practices above that were shared by program staff, **a majority of youth survey respondents reported positive experiences in BEST-funded programs when asked if they felt respected by program staff, if they felt heard by adults in the program, and if they felt safe in the program.** Across all three measures, there were no statistically significant differences in experiences reported by participants based on their reported sexual identity, but there were statistically significant differences[15] in the experiences reported by participants based on their reported race/ethnicity and gender identity. Specifically, those who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian generally reported less positive experiences and those who identified as girls or women generally reported more positive experiences.[16]

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[15] Throughout this report, statistically significant differences refer to when the p-value for test of significance is <0.05.
[16] Some identity groupings have smaller frequencies (e.g., for the Transgender, Genderqueer, Questioning, Another Identity group n=33 and for the Multiracial Identity group n=12), and as a result, the experience of just a few individuals can produce significant shifts in findings.

Feeling Respected. Of the 614 BEST survey respondents ages 11 or older who were asked how often they felt respected by staff, 73.5% (n=451) reported that they always did and 18.7% (n=115) reported they often did (see Figure 18). Although the average response was generally positive across the races/ethnicities and gender identities with which participants identified, there were statistically significant differences in the experiences reported. The share of youth who felt they were always respected by staff was lower for youth who identified as White/Caucasian (46.7%, n=14) and Asian or Pacific Islander (56.6%, n=30). This share was higher than average for youth who identified as Latinx/Hispanic (80.4%, n=328). Additionally, participants who identified as girls or women reported a higher share (79.9%, n=215) of always feeling respected by staff than participants who identified as transgender, genderqueer, questioning, or another gender identity (51.5%, n=17) or as boys or men (71.7%, n=205).

Figure 18. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or older, n=614): I felt respected by staff.
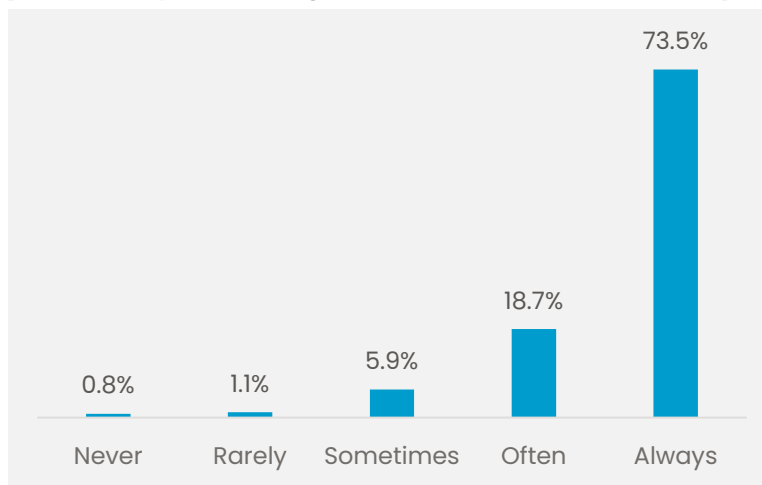
Figure 19. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older, n=614): In this program, adults listen to what I have to say.
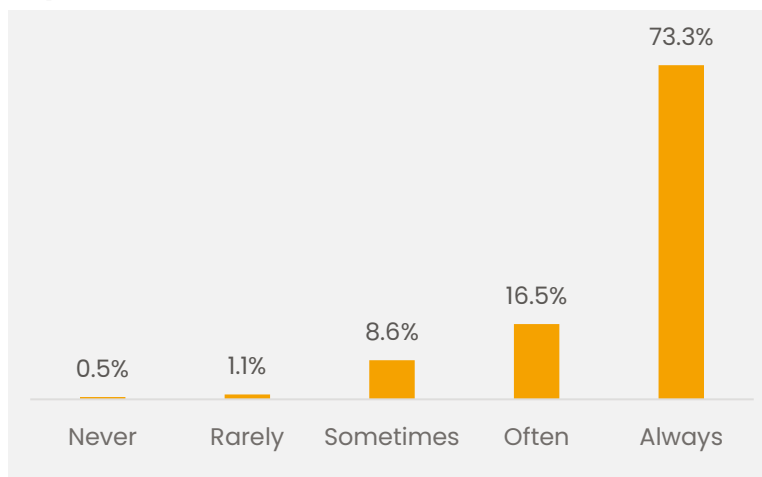
Feeling Heard. Of the 614 BEST survey respondents ages 11 or older who were asked how often they felt adults in the program listened to what they have to say, 73.3% (n=450) reported that they always did and 16.5% (n=101) reported they often did (see Figure 20). Similar to the participant experience of feeling respected by staff, the average response was generally

positive across the races/ethnicities and gender identities with which participants identified, but there were statistically significant differences in the experiences reported across races/ethnicities and gender identities. Specifically, the share of youth who felt that adults in the program always listened to what they have to say was lower for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (52.8%, n=28) and White/Caucasian (56.7%, n=17) and was highest for youth who identified as Latinx/Hispanic (79.2%, n=323). Additionally, participants who identified as girls or women reported a higher share (78.2%, n=212) of always feeling heard by staff than participants who identified as transgender, genderqueer, questioning, or another gender identity (60.6%, n=20) or as boys or men (71.6%, n=204).

Feeling Safe. Of the 613 BEST survey respondents ages 11 or older who were asked how often they felt safe in the program, 73.1% (n=448) reported that they always did and 18.3% (n=112) reported they often did (see Figure 19). Consistent with prior findings, while the average response was generally positive across the races/ethnicities and gender identities with which participants identified, there were statistically significant differences in the experiences reported. The share of youth who always felt safe in the program was lower for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (50%, n=27) and White/Caucasian (56.7%, n=17) and was highest for youth who identified as Latinx/Hispanic (79.9%, n=325). Additionally, participants who identified as girls or women reported a higher share (80.4%, n=218) of always feeling safe in the program than participants who identified as transgender, genderqueer, questioning, or another gender identity (48.5%, n=16) or as boys or men (70.4%, n=200).

Looking Forward

While programs are incorporating a wide variety of trauma-informed practices, many staff expressed a desire to access formal trauma-informed training. As the use of trauma-informed practices is a core component of the BEST Grant Program, collective trauma-informed training for BEST grantees could improve service delivery by strengthening the shared understanding and expanding the use of these practices throughout BEST programming. For the PY 2023-2024 cohort of grantees, PRNS will be hosting Community of Learning sessions, including a training on Trauma-Informed Care.

Evaluation Findings

Programs reported multiple ways in which their service delivery model is culturally responsive to the young people and community they serve, but there are opportunities for additional steps and shared understanding across the BEST Program.

Examples of culturally responsive practices used by programs include:

- Ensuring staff represent the youth served in the program, such as having staff who are Spanish or Vietnamese speakers or who come from a similar background or community.

- Incorporating values, morals, cultural works, and exemplary individuals from various cultures, including African-centered or indigenous cultures, into program curriculum.

- Recognizing how cultural differences can impact how youth interact with, receive, and show up to services, such as how culture can impact stigma around receiving mental health services or how youth experiencing homelessness may adopt a culture from living in encampments that necessitate survival skills.

- Offering written translation services for other languages and use of alternative non-language activities for youth who do not speak English.

- Soliciting feedback directly from the youth served that is then used to modify and adapt program services.

Although most programs shared examples of cultural responsiveness, fewer programs discussed their agency-level approach to cultural responsiveness, such as having specific policies and practices in place and reviewing them annually. Additionally, some translation services could be improved such as offering live phone translation in addition to written translation to allow for youth to fully participate in program activities.

A majority of youth survey respondents reported positive experiences related to language accessibility and their identity in BEST-funded programs. However, similar to participant experiences related to trauma-informed practices, there were statistically significant differences in the experiences reported by participants based on their reported race/ethnicity and gender identity. Specifically, those who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian generally reported less positive experiences and those who identified as girls or women generally reported more positive experiences.

Language Accessibility. Of the 612 BEST survey respondents ages 11 or older who were asked how often they felt program staff could communicate with them in the language of their choice, 71.4% (n=437) reported that they always did and 18.3% (n=112) reported they often did (see Figure 22). Although the average response was generally positive across the races/ethnicities with which participants identified, there were statistically significant differences in the experiences reported related to language accessibility. Specifically, the share of youth who felt that staff could always communicate with them in the language of their choice was lower for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (48.2%, n=26) and White/Caucasian (56.7%, n=17). This share was higher than average for youth who identified as Latinx/Hispanic (76.9%, n=312).

Figure 20. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older, n=612): Program staff can communicate with me in the language of my choice.
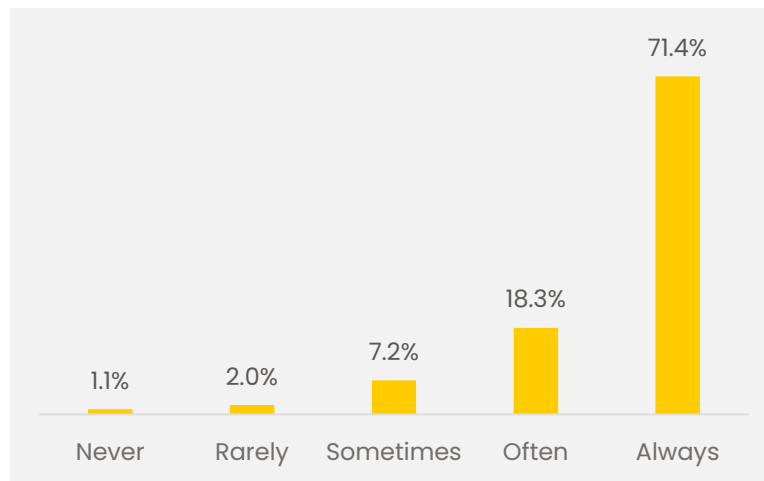
Identity. Of the 614 BEST survey respondents ages 11 or older who were asked how often they felt program staff understood their identity, such as their cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender identity, 71.0% (n=436) reported that they always did and 19.7% (n=121) reported they often did (see Figure 23). While most participants reported positive experiences related to staff understanding their identity, there were statistically significant differences in reported experiences based on the races/ethnicities and gender identities with which participants identified. Similar to the measure on language accessibility, the share of youth who felt that staff could always understand their identity was lower for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (38.9%, n=20) and White/Caucasian (56.7%, n=17) but was higher for youth who identified as Native American/Alaskan Native (75.9%, n=22) and Latinx/Hispanic (78.1%, n=318). Additionally, participants who identified as girls or women reported a higher share (79.3%, n=215) of always feeling like program staff could understand their identity than participants who identified as transgender, genderqueer, questioning, or another gender identity (54.6%, n=18) or as boys or men (66.3%, n=189).

Figure 21. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older, n=614): The people who work at this program understand my identity, such as my cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender identity.
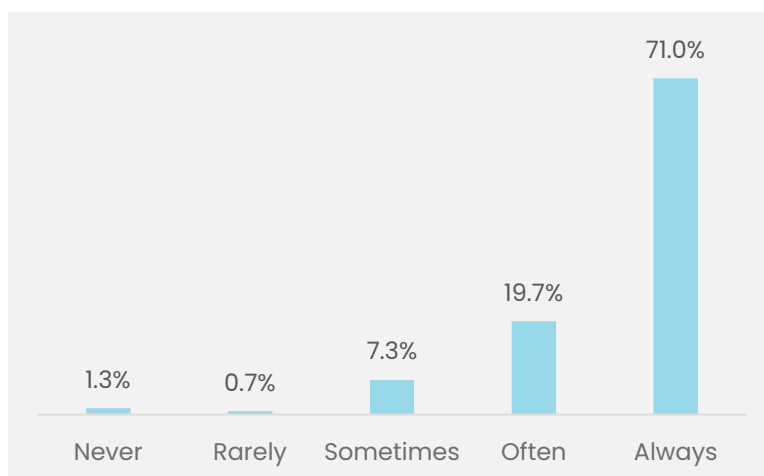
Looking Forward

Similar to the desire for a shared trauma-informed practices training, many staff stated that having regular cultural responsivity and diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings would be beneficial to them to better serve BEST youth and their communities. Some staff also expressed a desire to learn more about the local context in which they are operating programs, including the specific school environments in which their BEST programs are located. These, in addition to regular cultural responsivity and diversity trainings, could help facilitate shared understanding and create space to share learnings across the BEST Grant Program. As stated previously, PRNS plans to provide Community of Learning sessions for the PY 2023-2024 grantee cohort, which can be a space to provide these desired trainings.

PRNS should also consider factoring in costs for live translation services for program who serve youth from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds to help ensure equitable access to services.

Additionally, as the participant experiences were generally less positive for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander; White/Caucasian; Transgender, Genderqueer, Questioning, or Another Gender Identity; and Boys or Men, PRNS should collaborate with BEST grantees to explore potential reasons for this difference in experience and identify potential solutions to improve the BEST Grant Program for these populations.

Alignment with Positive Youth Development Principles

Positive youth development is a strengths-based approach to working with youth, and PYD frameworks help to identify the experiences, programming, and environments that support healthy youth development. There are eight recognized principles that youth-serving providers

should incorporate into their programming to promote positive youth development.[17] These principles include:

- **Protect physical and psychological safety—**Youth report feeling safe in youth programs where youth workers build trust and supportive relationships, when youth are not concerned about physical or psychological harm, and where youth are able to have fun and learn.

- **Create the appropriate structure—**Rules and expectations that regulate and govern participants' behaviors as well as how relationships and activities are arranged within the program, and staff provide age-appropriate leadership and/or facilitation of youth's programming and activities.

- **Build supportive relationships—**Relationships between youth participating in programs and nonparental adult staff or volunteers working with youth can foster resilience to mitigate the negative effects of stressors encountered by youth and provide youth with an array of opportunities for positive development and growth.

- **Offer opportunities to belong—**The extent to which youth feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others. This includes the need for frequent personal interactions with others and the need for a relationship or bond that includes stability, emotional concern, and maintenance into the future.

- **Encourage positive social norms—**Programs promote safe, healthy, and morally or ethically valued norms and discourage unhealthy, risky, or deviant behaviors.

- **Mentor, build efficacy, and offer opportunities to make a difference—**Youth have the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions; feel that their input is valued and respected; feel welcomed, supported, and included by adults and peers in their community; and contribute to projects that impact issues that matter to them and making a positive difference in their community.

- **Provide opportunities for skill-building—**Programs offer opportunities for youth to cultivate certain skills, including soft, technical, and life skills, by taking part in intentional learning activities.

- **Integrate across family, school, and community effort—**Healthy youth development is impacted not only by settings that directly impact the youth, such as their family, school, and neighborhood, but also by the interactions between these different settings.

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[17] United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Population Affairs – *Positive Youth Development Resources.* Retrieved 12/21/2023 from **https://opa.hhs.gov/adolescent-health/positive-youth-development/pyd-resources**.

The stronger the collaboration is between these settings, the better the development outcomes for youth can be.

Evaluation Findings

As the BEST Grant Program promotes a strength-based, positive youth development approach in its overall program model, we used this framework of eight positive youth development principles to assess the extent to which BEST-funded programs as implemented by grantees align with this approach. For this evaluation report, we have merged some principles together, resulting in four categories: (1) Program Environment, (2) Supportive Relationships, (3) Belong and Voice, and (4) Community-Wide Integration.

Program Environment

The Program Environment category is inclusive of four principles: protect physical and psychological safety, create the appropriate structure, encourage positive social norms, and provide opportunities for skill-building.

Overall, BEST Programs create environments that are conducive to positive youth development through promoting safety, providing developmentally appropriate structure and tailored activities, encouraging positive social norms, and providing a range of opportunities for skill development.

Safety. While this evaluation was limited in its ability to fully assess the physical safety of program spaces, many programs take steps to reduce the risk of physical fighting and promote positive social interactions and healthy habits among youth. Additionally, as discussed in the previous section, a vast majority (91.7%, n=1,088) of the 1,187 youth participants surveyed reported feelings of safety while participating in BEST-funded programs.

> "Staff try to keep the peace. This is a safe space to come to."
>
> - Youth Participant

Structure. BEST programs generally provide age-appropriate structure; meet the youths where they are developmentally, especially in goal setting for case management; tailor activities and curriculum based on feedback from participants, their identified needs, or participant age; and create spaces for a wide variety of activities and experiences from physical activity to facilitated groups to new experiences out in the community. Some programs also use a peer leadership model where youth can step into leadership roles, such as leading portions of activities or mentoring other youth.

Norms. Programs generally encourage positive social norms through program curriculum, model them through staff interactions and positive relationships with youth, and demonstrate

them through community events and engagement. For example, in one program session that was observed, the facilitators discussed examples of healthy versus abusive relationships.

Skill development. BEST-funded programs provide a range of opportunities for skill development, with the most common being social emotional skills, life skills, career skills, and critical thinking. Some BEST-funded programs also offer opportunities for cultural and civic engagement. A majority of youth who participated in BEST-funded programs reported learning new skills and gaining new knowledge from program activities. Specifically, 85.2% (n=524) of the 615 surveyed participants ages 11 or older reported that they always or often learned new skills that were helpful to them. Additionally, 83.3% (n=509) of the 611 respondents ages 11 or older reported that they always or often learned a lot of new things in their BEST-funded program.

Supportive Relationships

The Supportive Relationships category is inclusive of one principle: build supportive relationships.

The majority of BEST-funded programs focus on youth developing networks of support and healthy relationships with caring adults through their program and emphasize consistency in those relationships, even offering support to youth beyond their time of enrollment.

Programs funded under the case management service area offer more space for tailored coaching and mentorship with youth, and most programs offered under the personal transformation service area promote the development of peer-to-peer connections in addition to a relationship with a caring adult. Youth from several programs who participated in focus groups for the evaluation described very positive, supportive interactions with staff and described their relationships with staff as being more like family. Similarly, most youth who participated in focus groups felt that staff recognized their accomplishments and strengths, and many participants felt like staff were genuinely supportive of their successes and goals. Many participants also described the supportive peer relationships and support networks they were able to develop through their participation in BEST-funded programs.

"They don't treat me like they're getting paid to work with me. Treat me like their little brother or something. They would talk to me like a friend or help me with this or that. They have knowledge with what I need help on. Everyone here has something to offer."

– Youth Participant

"One of the biggest things was just giving me a support group. Before the program I was really isolated... So, when I was able to connect with other moms and meet people relating to me, I didn't feel so alone in my circumstances."

– Youth Participant

These findings were reflected in the BEST survey responses as well, with a majority of youth reporting that the program in which they participated helped them to get along with their peers and become connected to a caring adult from the program. Specifically, 75.9% (n=462) of the 609 surveyed participants ages 11 or older reported that the program always or often helped them to get along with people their own age. Additionally, 90.2% (n=553) of the 613 respondents ages 11 or older reported that there was always or often an adult in the program who cared about them.

Belonging and Voice

The Belonging and Voice category is inclusive of two principles: offer opportunities to belong and mentor, build efficacy, and offer opportunities to make a difference.

Although BEST Programs operate in a variety of settings, most programs described multiple strategies they use to create inclusive and welcoming spaces for youth where they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions, develop confidence in their own voice, and make a difference in their community.

Examples of the strategies that were shared by BEST agency staff and observed through this evaluation included:

- Using facilitation techniques that help create intentionally inclusive spaces for every youth to participate, especially youth who may be quieter or less likely to participate in large group settings.

- Using community agreements that are collectively developed by the participants and establishing judgment-free zones during groups activities to create space for reflection and sharing among participants.

- Using a variety of inclusive activities and approaches, so youth can participate in the way they feel most comfortable, such as the use of smaller breakout groups in addition to a full group discussion; using a variety of arts, games, and reflection techniques; and incorporating diverse cultures into curriculum and activities.

- Starting group activities with a check-in activity or question to help create a safe space and sharing atmosphere.

- Respecting youth choice in how they wish to participate and hearing and using their feedback when youth share it with staff.

- Emphasizing building youth confidence, agency, and skills in self-advocacy in one-on-one coaching and case management sessions.

- Allowing youth to identify opportunities for themselves to make a difference in their community, such as through youth-led service-learning projects.

Consistent with the use of these practices, as discussed in the previous section, a vast majority (89.7%, n=551) of the 614 youth participants (ages 11 or older) who were surveyed reported that they felt adults in the program always or often listened to what they had to say.

> "They ask us for our input or things that we want to bring up and talk about. They ask us our thoughts and what we've gained from it."
>
> - Youth Participant

Community-Wide Integration

The Community-Wide Integration category is inclusive of one principle: integrate across family, school, and community effort.

Many BEST Programs employ strategies to incorporate multiple systems of support for the youth they serve, including family, school, and community systems. However, some programs noted how this can be challenging and many see opportunities for growth in developing a community-wide system of support for youth.

As described in previous sections, many BEST programs involve family members or other existing networks of support in their service delivery model, such as including family-related goals in a youth's service plan, hosting events that are open to the community and family members to promote positive bonding opportunities, and working with school social workers or wellness centers to help connect youth to needed resources. However, multiple programs noted how it can be challenging to promote a holistic positive youth development environment when working in school settings where the administration relies on punitive conflict resolution models, such as suspensions.

Additionally, while some grantees have natural partnerships with other agencies and programs, many BEST agencies shared a desire to more intentionally build up a community-wide network of support for youth in San José and see the BEST Grant Program and its role within the Alliance as an opportunity to do so. BEST grantees participate in the Alliance's Tech Team quarterly meetings, but the grantees' perceived level of collaboration and partnership building in these meetings varied. Some grantees stated that they felt the meetings were a useful space to collaborate and build relationships with other agencies, but other grantees expressed that they were most helpful for immediate resource sharing but not true partnership building. Multiple programs appreciated the experiences they have had with the Alliance that went beyond resource sharing, including being involved in the most recent strategic planning efforts and receiving updates on gang activity in their community.

Looking Forward

Many BEST grantees expressed an interest in collaborative spaces through the BEST Grant Program where they could share best practices and learn from each other. PRNS could consider building such spaces into the Community of Learning sessions it plans to host for the PY 2023-2024 grantee cohort to help grantees continue to expand on their use of positive youth development program practices. Additionally, PRNS should continue to explore ways in which it can offer more support to BEST programs operating within school sites, such as more support in communicating with school districts to establish BEST program sites, leveraging existing City relationships to schedule meetings with school administrators, or having a City liaison embedded within schools to help facilitate these relationships. As of February 2024, PRNS had already begun taking steps to promote program coordination with schools, including:

- Conducting BEST program introductions with all the school sites receiving BEST services for PY 2023-2024.
- Gathering feedback from grantees on the type of school coordination support that would be most beneficial.
- Meeting with school sites mid-year to assess program implementation and partnerships with BEST-funded programs.
- Developing end-of-year surveys for grantees and school sites to share their experiences, successes, and challenges, and to identify additional areas of support needed.

BEST Program Administration

- **What are the main characteristics of the BEST program overall?**

- **What trainings are needed for the grantees to meet the program intended outcomes?**

To assess the main characteristics of the BEST programs overall, we asked programs about communication and collaboration with PRNS. We also asked program staff for recommendations on training topics that would be beneficial to grantees to better serve youth in their programs.[18]

Key Findings – Program Administration

- **Communication and Collaboration.** Grantee staff identified some key areas in which their communication and collaboration with PRNS could be improved, including more support for the development of BEST program staff or resources to support their development; more opportunities for PRNS staff to spend quality time with BEST-funded programs, such as through monitoring site visits; and reducing turnover in the PRNS Analyst positions.

- **Training.** BEST grantees identified a wide range of training topics that they felt would be beneficial to their service delivery and better serving youth, with the two most requested being (1) trauma-informed practices and understanding trauma experiences in youth and (2) diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural responsivity training.

BEST Program Communication and Collaboration

As a large grant program that funds between 12 and 20 community-based agencies each year across the City of San José, strong communication and collaboration practices between grantees and PRNS staff are instrumental to program implementation and administration.

Evaluation Findings

For most programs, the extent of communication and collaboration with the PRNS BEST administrative team depended on who they were interacting with, primarily their assigned analyst who acts as a liaison between grantees and the PRNS BEST Administrative Team. Grantees noted how it takes time for the analyst to build rapport with each agency and fully

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[18] In addition to the recommendations presented in this section, many program staff offered other recommendations related to BEST Grant Program administration. These are included in Appendix B.

understand each of their programs' components. Grantees appreciated having the PRNS Analysts come out to learn more about and experience their programs through a site visit process and noted how once rapport and program understanding are established, the quality of their communication and collaboration with the PRNS BEST Administrative Team improves. However, the PRNS Analyst position is an entry-level position on the BEST Administrative Team and is often subject to staff turnover as individuals often move to other positions within the City. This can be difficult for grantees who have been funded in consecutive program years when there is turnover in the PRNS Analyst position because they have to reestablish rapport and a shared understanding of their programs with their new PRNS Analyst. This can add to the administrative time and resources that grantees must spend implementing their BEST-funded programs.

Looking Forward

Programs identified a few ways in which they would like to see communication and collaboration with the PRNS BEST Administrative Team improved. These included more support for the development of BEST program staff or resources to support their development and more opportunities for PRNS staff to spend quality time with BEST-funded programs. PRNS should also consider ways to improve continuity of PRNS-Grantee relationships through the turnover within the Analyst positions.

Training Recommendations

Although the BEST Grant Program funds a wide variety of programs and services across the spectrum of prevention to intervention, all BEST-funded programs are working towards a shared goal of promoting the development of protective factors in youth that can buffer against vulnerabilities to violence and gang involvement. As such, to best serve the children, youth, and families that participate in the BEST Grant Program, PRNS aims to identify training topics that would be beneficial to all BEST grantees and could improve the program's service delivery.

Evaluation Findings

BEST programs identified a wide range of training topics that they felt would be beneficial to their service delivery and better serving youth. These topic areas included:

- Trauma-informed practices and understanding trauma experiences in youth.

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural responsivity training.

- Motivational Interviewing.

- Group facilitation practices.

- Case management best practices.

- Mental health and substance use.

- Non-violent communication and restorative justice.

- Family engagement.

- Human development.

- Emotional health and healthy relationships, including working with domestic violence and human trafficking situations.

- Serving LGBTQ youth.

- Self-care for staff.

- CPR/First Aid and mandated reporting.

- Gang prevention and intervention and updates on the local gang environment and community safety.

Looking Forward

When considering training topics for future program years, PRNS should prioritize the most frequently requested trainings, which were those for trauma-informed practices and diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural responsivity. Given the wide range of other potentially beneficial topics that grantees identified, PRNS should also work with grantees at the beginning of the program year to determine a calendar of trainings that could be offered throughout the year.

Additionally, as previously discussed, programs also expressed a desire for opportunities to learn from other BEST agencies to share learnings on service delivery and special topics. One program suggested a conference-style setting where agencies could host different workshops for the BEST grantee cohort.

Outcome Study Findings

Incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collected during PY 2022-2023 as well as photos taken by BEST participants through the Photovoice component, this Outcome Study Findings section explores the impact of the BEST Grant Program and other areas of inquiry outlined in the evaluation plan. Specifically, the findings are presented in three sections: (1) Participant Satisfaction, (2) Participant Outcomes, and (3) Participant Photovoice.

Participant Satisfaction

- **What is the level of satisfaction from the participants?**

Key Findings – Participant Satisfaction

- Of surveyed youth participants, 85.7% reported a high level of satisfaction with BEST-funded programs, and many participants highlighted how fun and helpful the program was and how wonderful and respectful the staff were.

- Levels of program satisfaction were highest for youth who identified as Native American/Alaska Native and Black/African American and lowest for youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian.

Evaluation Findings

A majority of youth participants reported a high level of satisfaction with BEST-funded programs, and many participants highlighted how fun and helpful the program was and how wonderful and respectful the staff were.

> "The program is fun, and I always look forward to coming to each session."
>
> - Youth Participant

> "I love the energy they bring to the program. Very positive and they care about your wellbeing."
>
> - Youth Participant

> "Very helpful with not just support but learning new things."
>
> - Youth Participant

> "Great program for its resources and great staff."
>
> - Youth Participant

Of the 614 BEST youth participants ages 11 or older who responded to the survey, 60.6% (n=372) reported they always want to keep coming to the program and 25.1% (n=154) reported that they often did. Consistent with other participant experience findings already discussed, the average response was generally positive across the races/ethnicities with which participants identified, but there were statistically significant differences in the experiences reported. Youth who identified as Native American/Alaska Native and Black/African American reported the highest share of always wanting to keep coming to the program with 69.0% (n=20) and 69.6% (n=32), respectively. The share of youth who reported always wanting to keep coming to the program was lowest for those who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (38.9%, n=21) and White/Caucasian (50%, n=15).

While the number of survey respondents who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander or White/Caucasian were not concentrated within any specific BEST-funded program, the distribution of these respondents across programs does generally reflect the racial/ethnic distributions of the unduplicated participants served by each agency (see Table 10). For example, some programs served little to no Asian and Pacific Islander or White youth, and some programs—such as The Art of Yoga Project, Caminar, Bill Wilson Center, and Alum Rock Counseling Center—served slightly more Asian and Pacific Islander or White youth ages 11 or older than other programs. The different experiences youth, especially non-Hispanic/Latinx youth, have in the various BEST-funded programs could lead to the differences in BEST program satisfaction reported in the participant survey.

Participant Outcomes

- **Did program participants from PY 2022-2023 experience positive outcomes during enrollment compared to before starting the program?**

- **What does the self-reported data indicate about program success and outcomes? Do the participants feel their lives have been impacted by the program? How?**

The BEST Grant Program aims to promote the development of protective factors in youth that can buffer against vulnerabilities to violence and gang involvement. BEST services are designed to improve short- and medium-term outcomes around positive youth development (e.g., improved relationships with peers and caring adults; improved life, coping, and/or critical thinking skills; improved self-esteem; improved coping mechanisms; improved connectedness) and increased school engagement. Less directly, BEST services are designed to lead to improvements in longer-term outcomes, like continued academic engagement/achievement and outcomes related to reduced risky behaviors and delinquency, such as violence and gang involvement, arrests, and other involvement with the criminal legal system.

This evaluation focused on measuring the effectiveness of the BEST Grant Program on promoting positive short- and medium-term outcomes for youth participants during the 2022-2023 program year. To identify these program outcomes, we asked both staff and youth participants who participated in focus groups to describe the BEST Grant Program impacts that they have seen or experienced and surveyed youth participants asking them to reflect on their experiences before participating in a BEST-funded program compared to their experience after their program participation.

Key Findings – Participant Outcomes

- Program participants and staff reported a multitude of ways that the BEST program helps promote positive impacts for the youth who participate, such as social emotional outcomes and skill development.

- Additional, results from the participant survey indicate an association between participation in BEST-funded programs and the development of positive outcomes in four areas:

  o **Development of Support Systems and Social Emotional Skills.**

- Following participation in a BEST-funded program, 87.9% of surveyed participants felt they had developed a relationship with a caring adult compared to only 60.2% before program participation, and 45% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

- Over three-quarters of youth participants reported having a person in their life that they could talk to about their feelings compared to only 51% who reported the same before the program, and 52% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

- Over 87% of surveyed BEST participants also reported confidence in their ability to resolve challenges or problems in their life following participation compared to 59.4% before program participation, and 44.6% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

o **Engagement in School and/or Work.**

- Across service areas, BEST-funded programs can support increased engagement in school or work for youth, improved academic performance, support to re-enroll in school, securing employment, and improved career readiness.

- Following participation in a BEST-funded program, 76.2% of surveyed participants felt they were connected to school and/or their job compared to only 44.7% before program participation, and 51.1% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

o **Reduced Engagement in Risky Behaviors.**

- Of surveyed BEST participants, 83.5% reported confidence in their decision-making ability after participating in the program compared to only 51.2% before participation, and 50.1% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

- Over 83% of surveyed youth reported an ability to stay away from peers who could have a negative influence in their life compared to only 57.7% who reported the same before participating in the program, and 47.7% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

o **Positive Visions for their Future.**

- Participants reported having more goals and plans for their future after participating in BEST-funded programs and increasing their motivation to better themselves and to work towards their goals.

> ▪ Almost 89% of surveyed youth reported having goals and plans for their future after participation compared to only 60.2% who reported the same before participation, and 44.4% reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program.

Evaluation Findings

Program staff and youth participants agreed that BEST programs positively impact many of the youth who participate in the various programs across a range of short- and medium-term outcomes, such as social emotional outcomes and skill development. Positive impacts shared through the focus groups for this evaluation included:

- Social emotional learning, such as gaining skills in self-advocacy, improved self-awareness and self-reflection, improved self-confidence, increased openness to change and sharing, and owning their mental health.

- Developing relationships with a caring adult, even some that extend past program enrollment.

- Building connections with peers and better social support.

- Changing their future away from gang involvement.

- Improved communication.

- Increased connection to their cultural identity and heritage.

- Making better life choices.

- Developing healthier coping strategies.

- Developing leadership skills.

- Life skill development.

- Getting connected to jobs.

- Reduction in suspensions from school.

- Drug use prevention.

In addition to the specific positive outcomes shared by individual participants, results from the participant survey indicate an association between participation in BEST-funded programs and the development of positive outcomes in four areas: (1) development of support systems and social emotional skills, (2) engagement in school and/or work, (3) reduced engagement in risky behaviors, and (4) positive visions for their future. The following section presents responses from the BEST participants ages 11 or older who completed the survey for PY 2022-2023.

Across these outcome areas, there was a statistically significant increase in protective factor development in participants when comparing their self-reported levels prior to their program enrollment and after their participation. For the youth participants with lower levels of these self-reported protective factors prior to their enrollment, BEST Grant Program participation is associated with an increase in protective factors. Approximately 75-80% of BEST participants who reported lower levels of protective factors prior to their program enrollment reported increased levels of protective factors after their participation. However, as a large proportion of BEST Grant Program participants exhibit characteristics that align with the At-Risk or High-Risk population profiles, a larger share of participants reported higher levels of these protective factors both prior to their enrollment as well as after their participation.

Youth participants across racial/ethnic identities all reported statistically significant increases in each protective factor discussed in the following sections. However, there was statistically significant, though minimal, variation in the extent of these changes from pre-enrollment to after program participation for youth from each racial/ethnic identity on average. Specifically, the differences in participant outcomes between racial/ethnic identities were largely driven by greater average change reported in protective factors for Native American and Alaskan Native youth and smaller amounts of average change in protective factors reported for Asian and Pacific Islander youth.[19] On average, Native American and Alaskan Native youth reported lower levels of these protective factors prior to their enrollment but reported similar levels of protective factors as other racial/ethnic identities after their enrollment, resulting in a greater change on average than youth from other racial/ethnic identities. Youth who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander reported pre-enrollment protective factors levels similar to Latinx/Hispanic youth but did not report experiencing as great of an increase in those protective factors as youth from other racial/ethnic identities after participating in BEST-funded programs.

For more detail on participant survey results, see Appendix A.

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[19] While these differences are statistically significant, it is important to note the differences in sample size across racial/ethnic identities. For example, there were 56 Asian and Pacific Islander survey respondents, 29 Native American and Alaskan Native respondents, and 418 Hispanic/Latinx respondents. As a result, the experience of just a few individuals can produce significant shifts in findings.

Support Systems and Social Emotional Skills

BEST-funded programs create environments where youth participants can develop supportive relationships with caring adults and peers, improve communication and problem-solving skills, and gain confidence in themselves.

> "Going to this high school, before I was deep into [this program], finding my identity was difficult. People were trying to put me in a stereotype. This helps you find yourself and be proud of who you are."
>
> - Youth Participant

> "Before I came, I wasn't close with my family. They would encourage me to talk to my mom about how I feel."
>
> - Youth Participant

> "[Staff person] is someone I trust telling her what I feel and what's going on in my life."
>
> - Youth Participant

Relationship with a Caring Adult. Following participation in a BEST-funded program, most participants felt they had developed a relationship with a caring adult. Of the PY 2022–2023 BEST participants ages 11 or older who were surveyed, 87.9% (n=540) responded that it was somewhat or very true that there is an adult they can go to who cares about them after participating in the program, compared to only 60.2% (n=375) who reported the same before participating in the program. Almost half of participants surveyed (45%, n=276) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only eight percent (n=49) reporting a reduction. Of the 239 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 80.1% (n=193) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 22. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): There was/is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, or somewhere else) who cares about me.
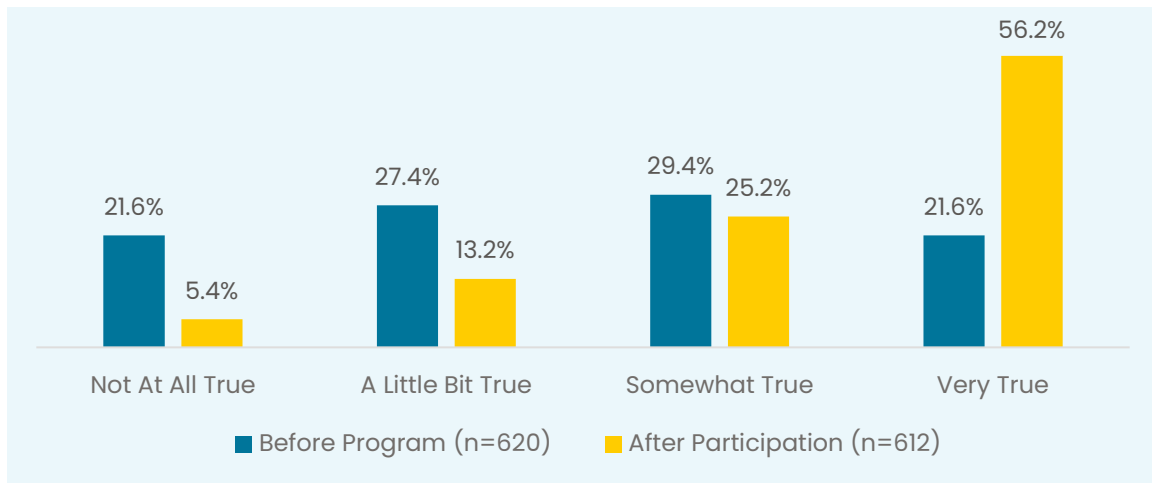
Support System. In addition to developing a relationship with a caring adult, over three-quarters of youth participants reported having a person in their life that they could talk to about their feelings. Of the youth respondents, 81.4% (n=498) responded that it was somewhat or very true that there is someone they could talk to about their feelings after participating in the program compared to only 51% who reported the same before participating in the program. More than half of participants surveyed (52%, n=318) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only six percent (n=39) reporting a reduction. Of the 297 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 76.8% (n=228) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 23. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): There was/is someone I could talk to about my feelings.
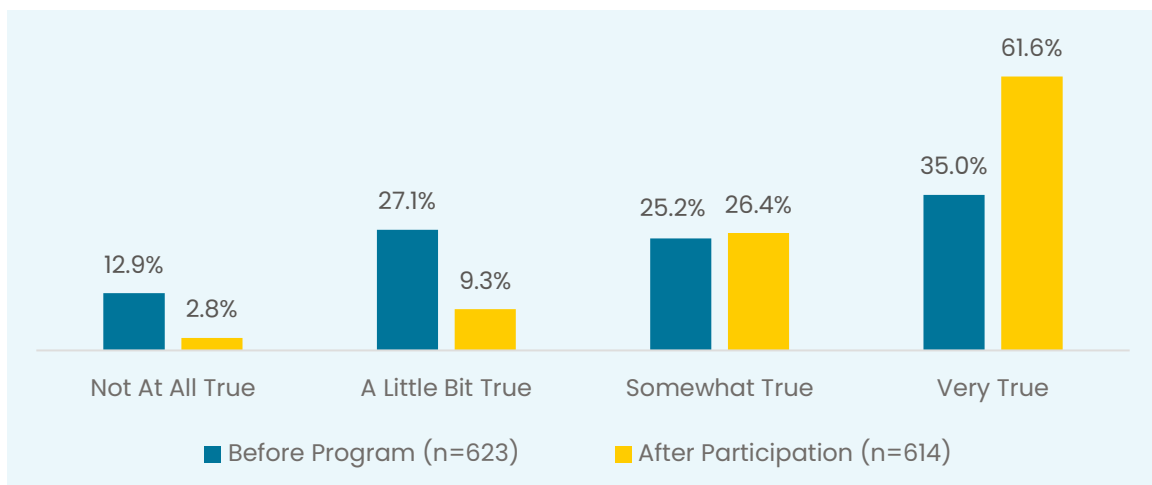
Problem Solving Skills. BEST participants also reported increased confidence in their ability to resolve challenges or problems in their life. Of the youth respondents, 87.6% (n=539)

responded after participating that it was somewhat or very true that they could handle problems or challenges when they came their way compared to 59.4% (n=368) who reported the same before participating in the program. Almost half of participants surveyed (44.6%, n=274) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only seven percent (n=42) reporting a reduction. Of the 246 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 79.3% (n=195) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 24. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): I could/can handle problems or challenges when they came/come my way.
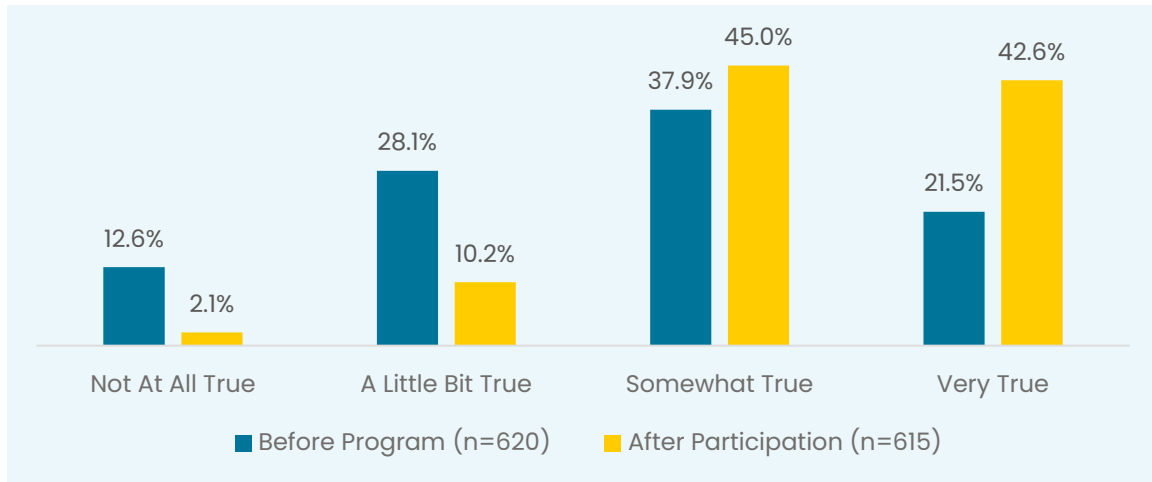
School and Career Engagement

Across service areas, BEST-funded programs can support increased engagement in school or work for youth, improved academic performance, support to re-enroll in school, securing employment, and improved career readiness.

"Before I didn't go to school and had bad grades. Now I focus and have better grades and go to class."

– Youth Participant

"I love it here. I've met new people. Staff are always here for me, helped my family, and helped me to find a job."
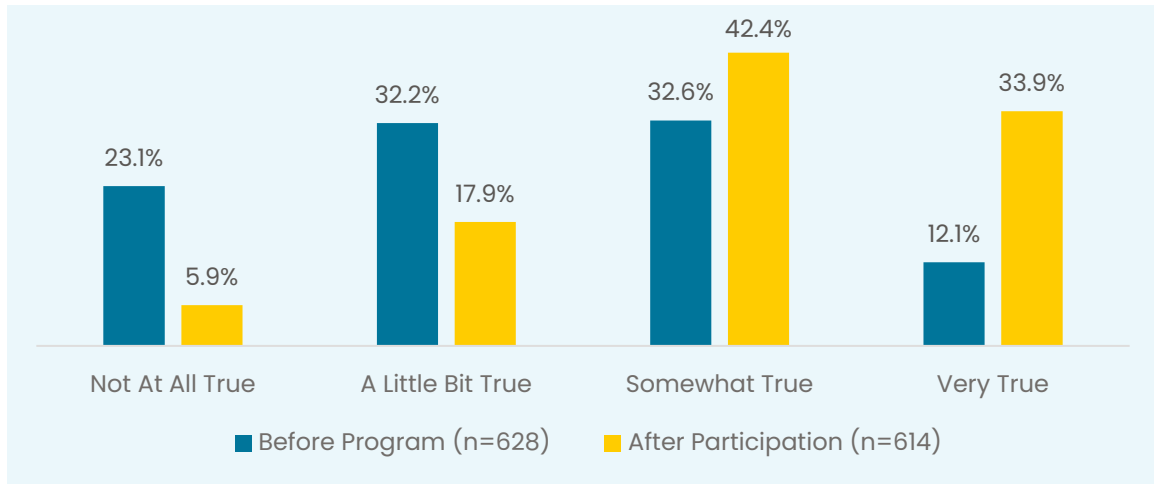
– Youth Participant

"This program has allowed me to become more in tune with my culture and overall made me feel more secure and sure about a career path. This program has spread awareness to how people of color are treated in workplaces and how to go about those types of situations. Since joining this program, it has allowed me to feel more secure about my future."

– Youth Participant

School and Work Engagement. Compared to before their enrollment in BEST-funded programs, many youths reported increased engagement in school and/or their job. Of the youth respondents, 76.2% (n=468) responded that after participating it was somewhat or very true that they felt connected to school and/or their job compared to only 44.7% (n=281) who reported the same before participating in the program. Over half of participants surveyed (51.1%, n=314) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only nine percent (n=56) reporting a reduction. Of the 338 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 74% (n=250) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 25. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): I felt/feel connected to school and/or my job.

Risky Behaviors

BEST participants reported that their participation in the program helped them to reduce the risky behaviors they engage in, such as substance use or gang involvement. BEST participants also reported improvements in decision-making skills and avoiding peer relationships that could contribute to risky behaviors.

"Before I was starting to buy drugs - made me forget about everything. It's not about gangs here, just about fun. It's helped me prevent a lot of things I would have been doing through the advice they gave me."

\- Youth Participant

"[They] helped me get off drugs."

\- Youth Participant

"I want to improve as a person, not just for myself but for the people around me. So, I cut off some people who pressured me to drink, smoke, and party. I want to benefit myself."
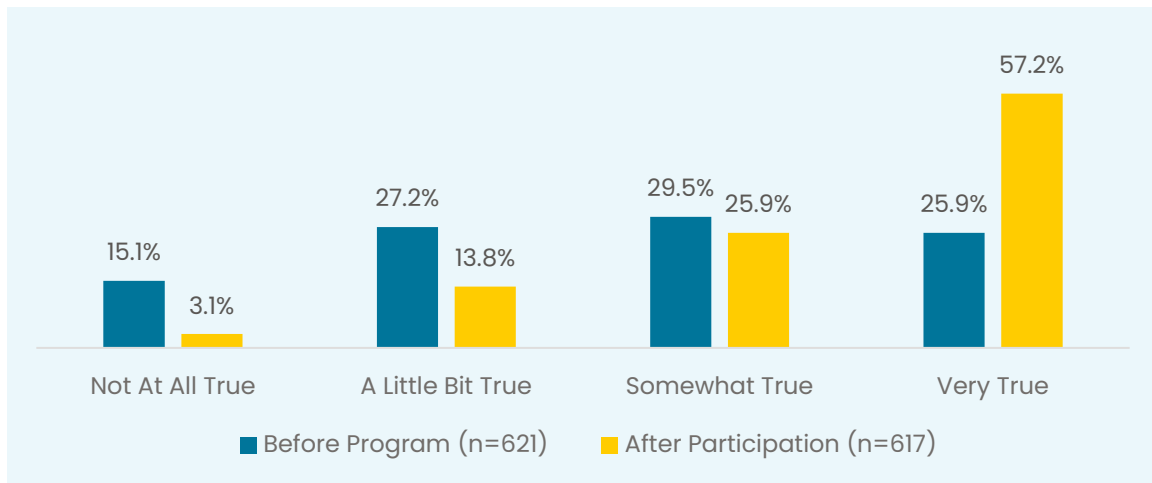
\- Youth Participant

Decision Making. A majority of BEST participants reported an improvement in their decision-making ability after participating in the program. Of the youth respondents, 83.5% (n=517) responded that after participating it was somewhat or very true that they thought things through carefully before making decisions compared to 51.2% (n=318) who reported the same before participating in the program. Over half of participants surveyed (50.1%, n=314) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only seven percent (n=45) reporting a reduction. Of the 300 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 81% (n=243) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 26. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): I thought/think things through carefully before making decisions.
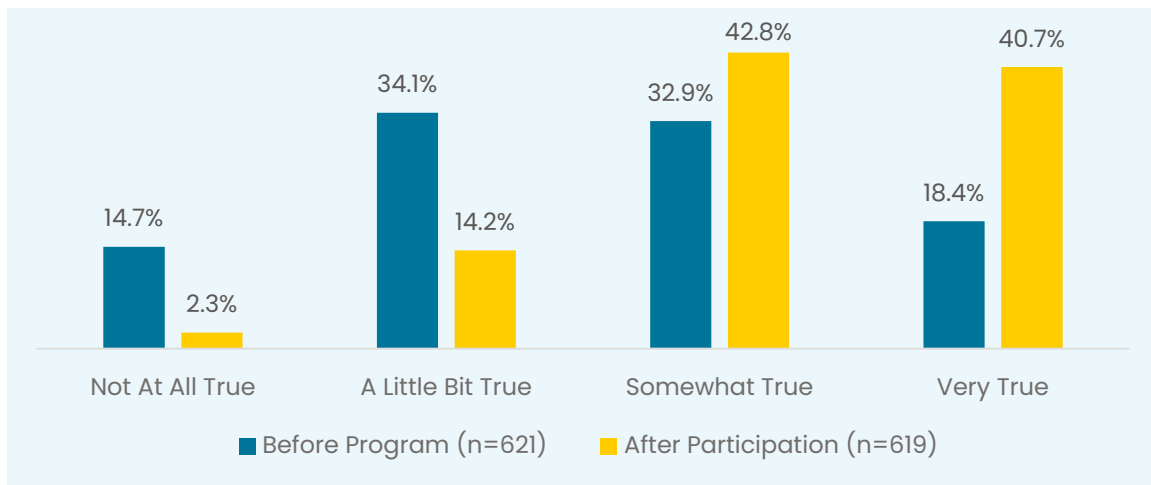
Peer Relationships. In addition to improved decision-making skills, youth reported that improved in their ability to stay away from peers who could have a negative influence in their life. Of the youth respondents, 83.1% (n=513) responded that after participating it was somewhat or very true that they stayed away from friends who peer pressured them to make bad decisions compared to 57.7% (n=358) who reported the same before participating in the program. Almost half of participants surveyed (47.7%, n=294) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only six percent (n=34) reporting a reduction. Of the 261 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 76.6% (n=200) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 27. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): I stayed/stay away from friends who pressured/pressure me to make bad decisions.

Before Program (n=621) | After Participation (n=617)

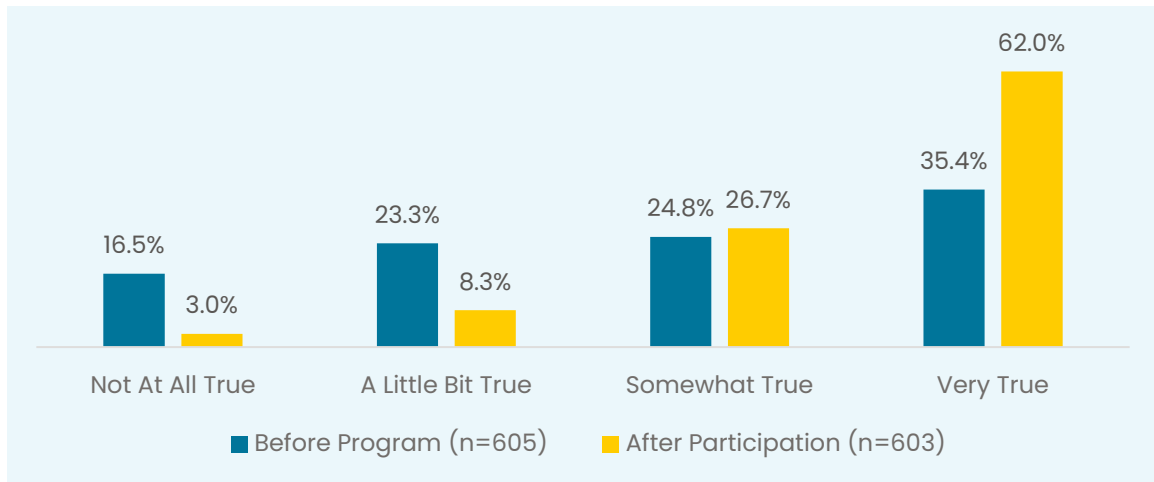|	Not At All True	A Little Bit True	Somewhat True	Very True
Before Program	15.1%	27.2%	29.5%	25.9%
After Participation	3.1%	13.8%	25.9%	57.2%

Vision for the Future

Lastly, participants reported having more goals and plans for their future after participating in BEST-funded programs and increasing their motivation to better themselves and to work towards their goals.

"This program made me realize I was in a bad place and gave me motivation to better myself as a person."

- Youth Participant

"Staff here are really nice. It's about better decisions, better mindset, and all about the slow process, and they helped me get on the path to success."

- Youth Participant

Future Goals. Of the youth respondents, 88.7% (n=535) responded that after participating it was somewhat or very true that they have goals and plans for the future compared to 60.2% (n=364) who reported the same before participating in the program. Nearly half of participants surveyed (44.4%, n=268) reported an increase in this protective factor after participating in the program, with only six percent (n=39) reporting a reduction. Of the 238 youth who responded that this was not at all or only a little bit true for them before participating in the program, 81.9% (n=200) reported that this improved for them after their participation.

Figure 28. Participant Survey Result (Ages 11 or Older): I had/have goals and plans for the future.

Before Program (n=605) · After Participation (n=603)

	Not At All True	A Little Bit True	Somewhat True	Very True
Before Program	16.5%	23.3%	24.8%	35.4%
After Participation	3.0%	8.3%	26.7%	62.0%

Participant Photovoice

- **How is the program affecting individual participants?**

To gain a deeper understanding of the youth experience in BEST-funded programs and their impact, youth participants from PY 2022-2023 were invited to participate in a photovoice project in the summer of 2023. A photovoice engagement invites youth participants to take photographs in response to a series of prompts using a personal smartphone camera or similar. This photovoice project aimed to allow youth participants to illustrate, highlight, and capture their experience and program impact, if any, through their lens and their voice. The prompts that photovoice participants used to guide their photo taking included:

- **What has my experience in the BEST program meant to me?**

- **What do I love about the BEST Program?**

- **What would I like to see change in the BEST Program?**

- **What do I need from the BEST Program to thrive as a young person? What have you seen change?**

- **What has the BEST Program's impact been in my life?**

Four BEST participants engaged in the photovoice project between July and August 2023. Youth first submitted their photos to the evaluation team, then participated in a reflection interview or focus group in which they reflected on the meaning behind each photo they took and finalized a corresponding caption for each photo. The prompts used for these reflection interviews and focus groups included:

- **Tell me the story of this photo.**

- **What do you see in this photo?**

- **What else in happening in this photo?**

- **How could this impact other young people?**

- **What about this photo would you like to share with the City?**

"The BEST program's impact has been giving me a foundation where I don't feel left behind. I feel like no matter what part of my life I am trying to work on, I will have some kind of support that wouldn't leave me behind."

Javia Lee

"I think a lot of young adults struggle with some kind of substance abuse and I think we need to raise awareness on ways to help young adults find healthy ways to cope. Young adults need help to move forward away from needing to rely on certain substances allowing them to recognize the unhealthy habits going on in their surroundings. In my personal experience, I had to learn that I was a product of my environment, and I had to recognize wanting more from myself and wanting a healthy environment to grow in."

Javia Lee

> "I have been able to build a better connection with my religion and spiritual practices. I have been able to see the kindness in others heart to just want to be willing to help any way they can. This has made me connect with God and see all the blessings I have been sent to improve my life."

"The BEST program gave me an opportunity to get the resources I needed to be healthy and build a foundation for myself. As a collective, we have had trouble building healthy relationships with habits that affect us in an unhealthy way. When you grow up struggling and never knowing when your next meal will be, it makes it hard to not be in survival mode."

Javia Lee

"We as a community have taken for granted just how much we actually have. We waste so much resources that could help so many other homeless families and people. We as a community have to do a better job at giving away the food we no longer are eating to someone who is in need."

"I think as a young adult I need a place that will support helping me find ways to grow financially to open my own doors and build my own form of foundation. It would help young adults thrive more if they had a place where they could get help to actually support their dreams and make plans to execute these plans."

Javia Lee

"This photo shows us as a community coming together no matter what differences we may have, we still should be able to come to an agreement and understanding of one another. For so long we have isolated one another and isolated cultures for their differences, instead of growing and learning and building with one another. We have the power to make so much change, starting with ourselves and looking internally."

Javia Lee

"This photo of Rikko talking to someone on the phone is important to me because when I need someone to talk to when I was at a really low point in life, I was able to talk to Rikko and he was part of New Hope and he gave me a safe space and someone to talk to."

David Rodriguez

"They will show you a different view of the world and show that there is more to it than just the streets."

David Rodriguez
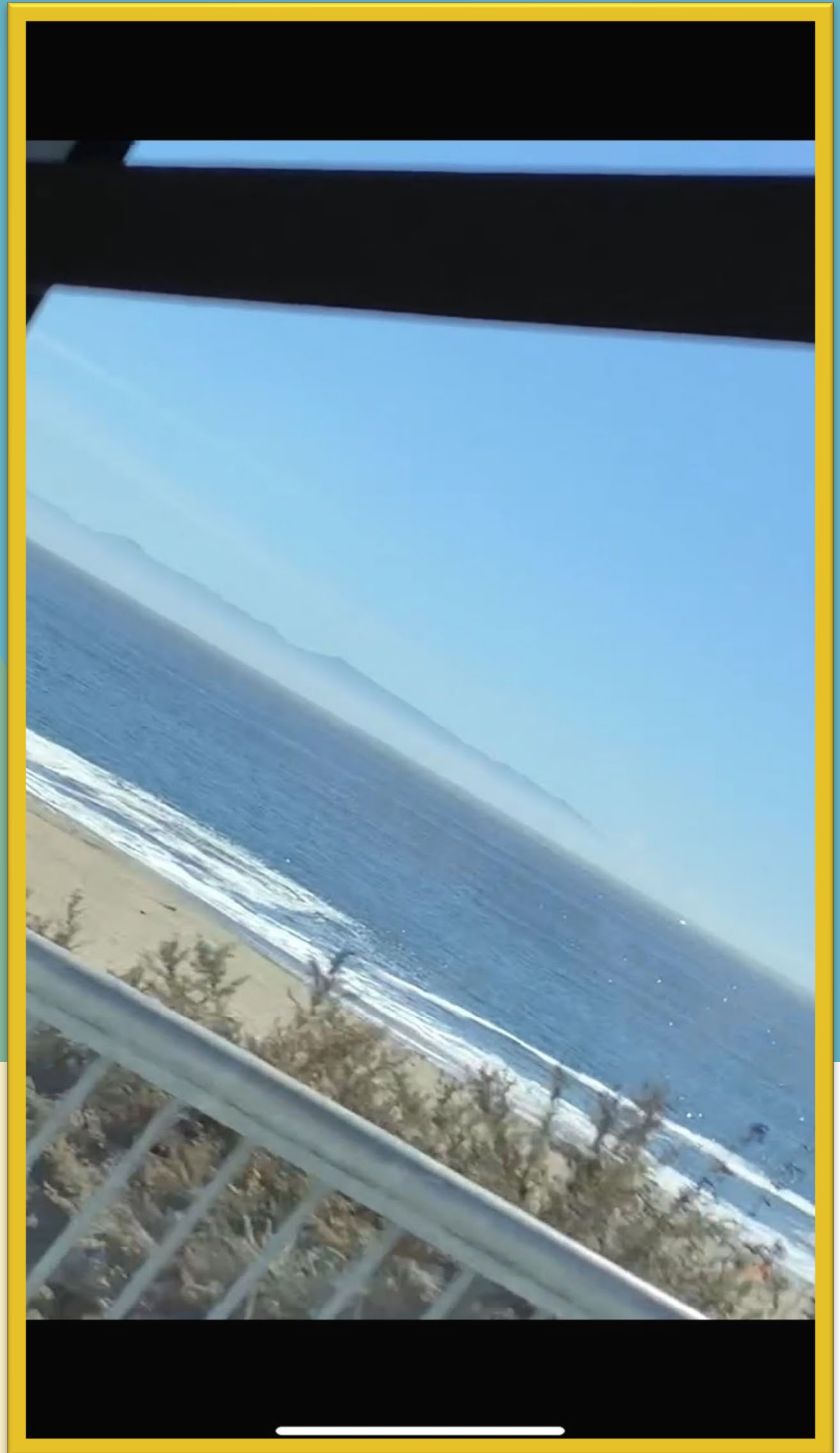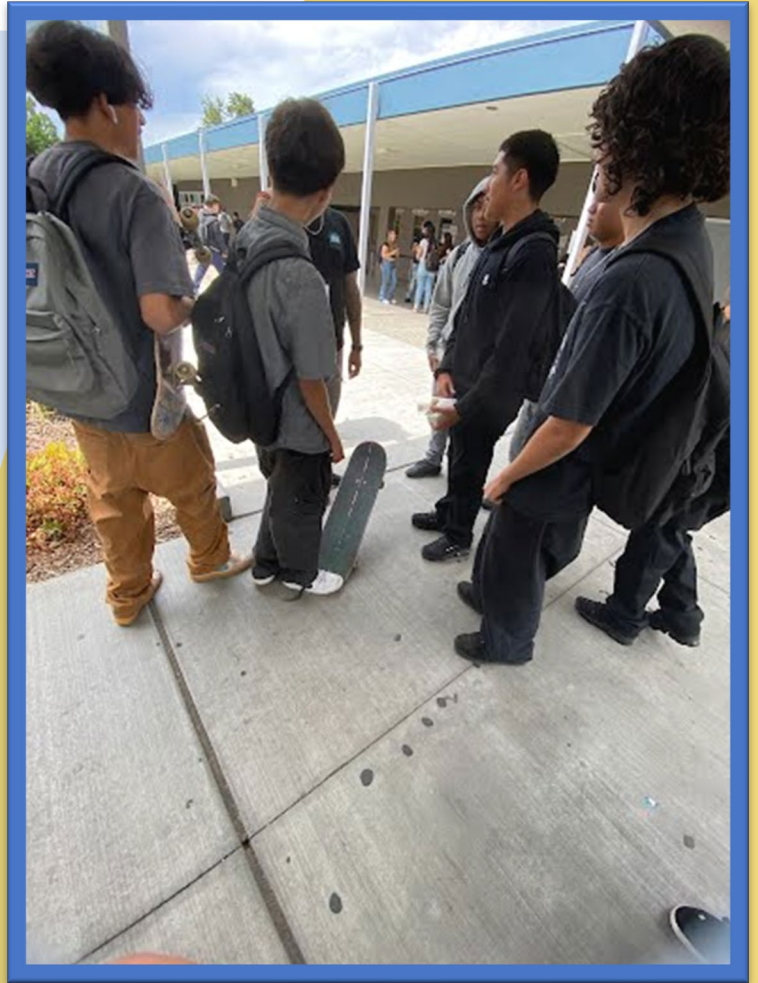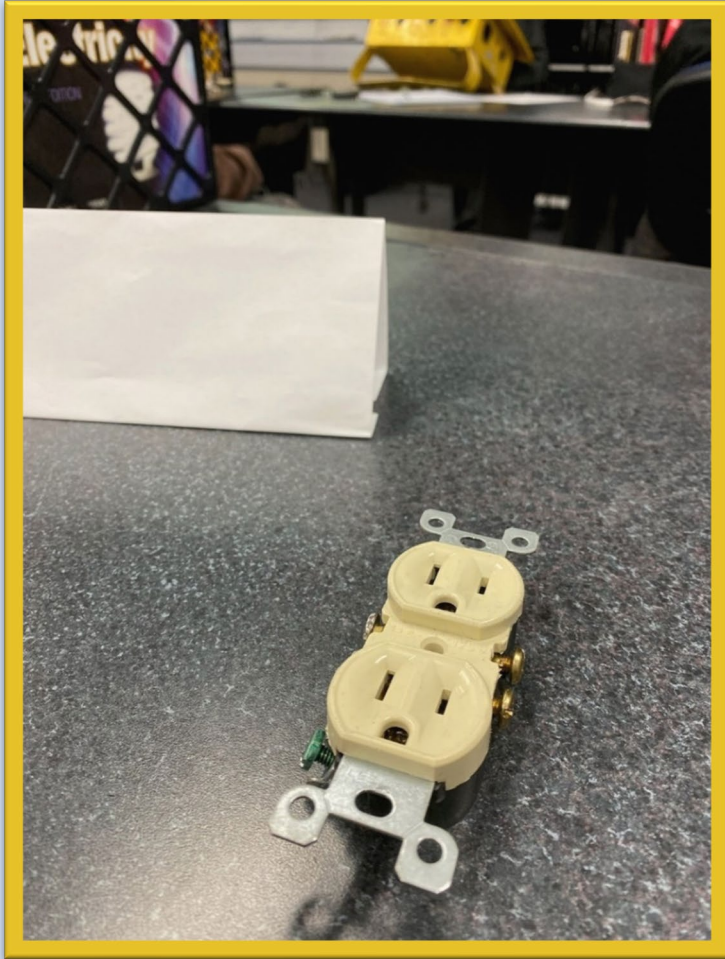
Uriel Rios

"New Hope for Youth impacted my life because it gave me many opportunities as well as days where we could have fun, so we wouldn't be out doing things we weren't supposed to allowing me to make better decisions. In this case, it being me choosing to join an electrician class. I could be out anywhere not caring for my education or even be in school and make bad decisions, but I choose to hangout with the right people."

Sergío Ledezma

"Those around you can influence you. I would have never been able to work with The Tenacious Group if I wasn't forced to take drama. Without the confidence from drama, I wouldn't have worked with The Tenacious Group, and without The Tenacious Group, I would've never gotten to meet so many new and amazing people and, lastly, would never have been able to participate in Photovoice."

Sergío Ledezma

"Even if you believe you have no purpose, you do — no matter if it's small or if it's massive. That's what I and The Tenacious Group believe."

"The BEST Program broke me out of my shell and showed me that even at your lowest points, you'll have people to support you like a small tree turning giant with love and support."

Sergío

Ledezma

Conclusion

This report provides an overview of the BEST Grant Program during PY 2022-2023, highlighting the main outputs and characteristics of the program's implementation as well as the main participant outcomes and impact of the program.

In PY 2022-2023, BEST grantees exceeded the projected UOS and concentrated services in neighborhoods and school sites with the greatest need in San José. BEST-funded programs served 3,366 unduplicated participants, the majority of whom were Latinx/Hispanic, of high school age, and whose characteristics aligned with the At-Risk and High-Risk population profiles.

A majority of youth participants reported a high level of satisfaction with BEST-funded programs, and many participants highlighted how fun and helpful the program was and how wonderful and respectful the staff were. The BEST Grant Program's impact concentrated in areas of improved support systems and social emotional skills, increased school and work engagement, reduction of risky behaviors, and increased visions and hopes for the future.

This report also highlights areas for PRNS to consider for future years of the BEST Grant Program. A summary of these recommendations is presented below.

1. Explore new processes or systems to improve the collection of individual level data that would allow for the use of secondary data, such as administrative school data, to supplement the evaluation.

2. Implement the standardized risk-level tool with high-school age program populations to measure how the youth served through each funded program align with the BEST Grant Program's intended service population profiles and determine if there is a need for an age-appropriate tool for use with participants ages 10 and younger.

3. Assess how effective the whole family case management area is in strengthening families and promoting the development of protective factors for youth and families.

4. Implement new referral data collection processes and use data to identify the needs of children, youth, and family participants in the BEST Grant Program and to facilitate stronger referral systems between BEST agencies and other City or county-level services and resources.

5. Offer trainings most requested by BEST grantees, including trainings on trauma-informed practices, cultural responsivity, and local context and environment updates.

6. Factor in costs for live translation services for programs who serve youth from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

7. Collaborate with BEST grantees to explore potential reasons for the difference in participant experience and outcomes based on participant identity, especially for youth who identify as Asian or Pacific Islander, and identify potential solutions to improve the BEST Grant Program for these populations.

8. Create collaborative spaces for BEST grantees to share best practices and learn from each other to help facilitate an expansion of the use of positive youth development program practices and other best practices.

9. Explore ways in which it can offer more support to BEST programs operating within school sites, such as more support in communicating with school districts to establish BEST program sites, leveraging existing City relationships to schedule meetings with school administrators, or having a City liaison embedded within schools to help facilitate these relationships.

10. Identify ways to support the development of BEST program staff and more opportunities for PRNS staff to spend quality time with BEST-funded programs. PRNS should also consider ways to improve continuity of PRNS-Grantee relationships through the turnover within the Analyst positions.

11. Work with grantees at the beginning of the program year to determine a calendar of trainings that could be offered throughout the year.

Appendix A. Participant Exit Survey

For this evaluation report, RDA used a participant exit survey for youth ages 11 and older. A copy of the survey is included in this appendix on the pages following the survey respondent characteristics and summary tables of survey results.

Survey Respondents

The standard participant survey for participants ages 11 and older was designed as a retrospective pre-post and post-only tool and asked about a series of protective factors and participant experience in the program. See Table 10 below for the characteristics of the 641 participants who completed the standard participant survey.

Table 12. Participant Survey Respondent Characteristics, Ages 11 or Older

	%	(n)
Race/Ethnicity (n=641)		
Asian or Pacific Islander	9%	(56)
Black/African American	7%	(46)
Hispanic/Latinx	65%	(418)
Multiracial	2%	(12)
Native American/Alaskan Native	5%	(29)
White/Caucasian	5%	(30)
Refused/Missing	8%	(50)
Gender Identity (n=641)		
Boy or Man	46%	(296)
Girl or Woman	43%	(273)
Transgender, Genderqueer, Questioning, Another Identity	5%	(34)
Refused/Missing	6%	(38)
Sexual Identity (n=641)		
Bisexual	6%	(41)
Heterosexual/Straight	70%	(448)
Lesbian or Gay	2%	(13)
Queer, Questioning, Another Identity	7%	(43)
Refused/Missing	15%	(96)
Age (n=641)		
11-13	8%	(51)
14-18	76%	(485)
19-24	10%	(63)
25+	1%	(9)
Missing	5%	(33)
Free or Reduced Lunch (n=641)		
Yes	73%	(471)

No	9%	(58)
Unsure	7%	(46)
Refused/Missing	10%	(66)
BEST Provider (n=628)		
Alum Rock Counseling Center	10%	(65)
Bill Wilson Center	10%	(62)
Caminar	6%	(36)
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	21%	(130)
ConXión	8%	(52)
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	6%	(36)
New Hope for Youth	15%	(92)
Pacific Clinics	2%	(10)
Shine Together	3%	(17)
The Art of Yoga	9%	(56)
The Tenacious Group	10%	(61)
Ujima	2%	(11)
Length Enrolled (n=641)		
A few weeks	11%	(70)
1-3 months	18%	(118)
4-6 months	23%	(145)
7 months to a year	14%	(88)
Over a year	15%	(99)
Multiple years	9%	(59)
Unsure/Missing	10%	(62)
Frequency Attend (n=641)		
Everyday	16%	(101)
A few times a week	24%	(154)
Once a week	25%	(161)
A few times a month	12%	(79)
Once a month	4%	(26)
I've been a few times	9%	(60)
Unsure/Missing	9%	(60)

Summary Survey Results Tables

Table 13. Participant Survey Results - Program Satisfaction Questions, Ages 11 or Older

Question (Sample Size)	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I want to keep coming to this program (N = 614)	0.16%	2.44%	11.73%	25.08%	60.59%
I have learned a lot of new things here (N = 611)	0.49%	2.78%	13.42%	29.30%	54.01%
This program helps me to get along with other people my age (N = 609)	0.99%	5.09%	18.06%	28.90%	46.96%
I have felt respected by program staff	0.81%	1.14%	5.86%	18.73%	73.45%

(N = 614)					
There is an adult at this program who cares about me (N = 613)	1.14%	1.31%	7.34%	23.16%	67.05%
In this program, adults listen to what I have to say (N = 614)	0.49%	1.14%	8.63%	16.45%	73.29%
The people who work at this program understand my identity, such as my cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender identity (N = 614)	1.30%	0.65%	7.33%	19.71%	71.01%
Program staff can communicate with me in the language of my choice (N = 612)	1.14%	1.96%	7.19%	18.30%	71.41%
I feel safe in this program (N = 613)	0.49%	1.47%	6.69%	18.27%	73.08%
I've learned new skills that are helpful to me (N = 615)	1.46%	1.63%	11.71%	23.25%	61.95%

Table 14. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 605) **	2.3	3.0
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 602) **	2.8	3.5
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 605) **	2.5	3.2
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 603) **	2.7	3.3
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 605) **	2.7	3.4
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 599) **	2.5	3.3
I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 601) **	2.4	3.4
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 587) **	2.8	3.5

Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"

*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level*

Table 15. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

Asian and Pacific Islander Youth -

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 54) **	2.4	3.1
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 53) **	2.9	3.5
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 52) **	2.7	3.2
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 52) **	2.7	3.2

	Before	Now
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 53) **	2.9	3.4
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 53) **	2.6	3.3
I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 54) **	2.5	3.2
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 54) **	2.9	3.3
Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"		
*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level		

Table 16. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

Black/African American Youth -

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 45) **	2.3	3.2
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 43) **	2.6	3.4
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 45) **	2.6	3.3
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 45) **	2.6	3.4
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 45) **	2.7	3.5
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 45) **	2.3	3.3
I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 45) **	2.3	3.5
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 44) **	2.8	3.4
Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"		
*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level		

Table 17. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

Hispanic/Latinx Youth -

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 397) **	2.4	3.1
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 396) **	2.9	3.5
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 398) **	2.6	3.3
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 397) **	2.8	3.3
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 396) **	2.8	3.4

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 391) **	2.6	3.4
I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 393) **	2.5	3.4
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 384) **	2.8	3.5

Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"

*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level*

Table 18. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

Multiracial Youth -

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 11) **	2.0	2.8
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 12) *	3.2	3.9
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 12) *	2.3	3.2
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 12) **	2.6	3.4
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 12) *	2.3	3.1
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 12) **	2.4	3.7
I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 12) **	2.3	3.8
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 12) *	2.9	3.8

Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"

*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level*

Table 19. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

Native American and Alaskan Native Youth -

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 29) **	1.7	3.0
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 29) **	2.3	3.5
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 29) **	1.8	3.1
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 29) **	2.1	3.1
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 29) **	2.0	3.1
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 29) **	1.8	3.2

I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 29) **	1.7	3.4
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 27) **	2.3	3.7

Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"

*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level*

Table 20. Participant Survey Results – Pre-Post Average Comparison, Ages 11 or Older

White Youth -

Question (Sample Size)	Before	Now
I feel connected to my school and/or my job (N = 28) **	2.0	2.6
There is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, etc) (N = 27) **	2.7	3.3
I think things through carefully before making decisions (N = 28) **	2.1	2.9
I can handle problems or challenges when they came my way (N = 27) **	2.1	2.9
I stay away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions (N = 28) **	2.4	3.0
There is someone I could talk to about my feelings (N = 28) **	2.4	3.3
I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me (N = 28) **	2.1	3.4
I have goals and plans for the future (N = 26) **	2.1	3.2

Numeric values correspond with the following values: 1 "Not at all true," 2 "A little bit true," 3 "Somewhat true," 4 "Very true"

*Difference statistically significant at 0.05 level; **Difference statistically significant at 0.01 level*

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Staff to Complete:
Agency: _____
Location: _____
Eligible Service Area: _____
Date: _____

2022 – 2023 BEST Youth Survey

The purpose of this 5-minute survey is to hear from you about your experience participating in this program. This survey is optional; there are no wrong answers.

For each question, think about how true the statement was you **before you began** the program and then think about true the statement is **now** for you.

- First, circle your response based on how you felt **BEFORE YOU BEGAN** the program in the left column.
- Then, circle your response based on how you feel **NOW** in the right column.

Before You Began the Program:	**Now:**
1. I felt connected to my school and/or my job. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, I feel connected to my school and/or my job. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
2. There was an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, or somewhere else) who cares about me. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, there is an adult I can go to (in this program, at home, school, or somewhere else) who cares about me. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
3. I thought things through carefully before making decisions. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, I think things through carefully before making decisions. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
4. I could handle problems or challenges when they came my way. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, I can handle problems or challenges when they come my way. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
5. I stayed away from friends who pressured me to make bad decisions. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, I stay away from friends who pressure me to make bad decisions. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
6. There was someone I could talk to about my feelings. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, there is someone I can talk to about my feelings. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
7. I knew about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, I know about other resources or opportunities that could be helpful to me. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true
8. I had goals and plans for the future. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true	Now, I have goals and plans for the future. Not at all true A little bit true Somewhat true Very true

Please read each item and mark the answer by circling the number that best corresponds to how you feel about each statement now.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I want to keep coming to this program.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have learned a lot of new things here.	1	2	3	4	5
3. This program helps me to get along with other people my age.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have felt respected by program staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. There is an adult at this program who cares about me.	1	2	3	4	5
6. In this program, adults listen to what I have to say.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The people who work at this program understand my identity, such my cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender identity.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Program staff can communicate with me in the language of my choice.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel safe in this program.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I've learned new skills that are helpful to me.	1	2	3	4	5

Is there anything else you want to share about the program?

About You

How long have you been in this program?

○ A few weeks ○ 1-3 months ○ 4-6 months ○ 7 months to a year ○ Over a year ○ Multiple years ○ Not sure

How often do you attend this program?

○ I've been a few times ○ Once a month ○ A few times a month ○ Once a week ○ A few times a week ○ Everyday ○ Not sure

Do you identify as:

○ Young Man ○ Young woman ○ Genderqueer ○ Transgender man

○ Transgender woman ○ Questioning or unsure of gender identity ○ Another identity not listed ○ Prefer not to answer

What is your current age group?

○ Younger than 10 ○ 11-13 ○ 14-18 ○ 19-24 ○ 25+

Which of the following best describes you?

○ Heterosexual /Straight ○ Lesbian or Gay ○ Bisexual ○ Queer ○ Questioning or unsure of sexual orientation ○ Another sexual identity not listed ○ Prefer not to say

What is your race/ethnicity? (mark all that apply)

○ African American/ Black ○ Latino/ Hispanic ○ Pacific Islander ○ Asian ○ Native American/ Alaska Native ○ White/ Caucasian ○ Multiracial or Biracial ○ Prefer not to say

Another (please fill in): _____

What zip code do you live in?

_____
(Fill In)

○ Prefer not to say

If you are in school, do you receive Free Lunch?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Not Sure ○ Prefer not to say

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Appendix B. Additional Grantee Recommendations

In addition to recommendations for desired trainings and improvements to communication and collaboration, BEST grantee staff shared recommendations related to contract monitoring, funding, and evaluation, and BEST participants shared recommendations related to services. The PRNS BEST Administrative Team has reviewed these recommendations, and as of February 2024, has begun work with a core group of BEST grantees to address a number of these recommendations.

- **Contract monitoring**

    - Programs largely wanted more flexibility in their contracts to allow them to count time spent on BEST-related administrative tasks and tasks like writing notes for coaching sessions.

    - Many programs want to see a shift in monitoring practices away from quantitative output monitoring and space for reporting that captures inputs and outcomes.

    - Many programs also wished to see more flexibility in variation between planned and actual units of service, especially when a program is over performing in one activity but underperforming in another.

    - Some programs also noted the need to have increased flexibility in planned activities, so programs can better adapt to the community's current needs during a program year.

- **Funding**

    - At least one program expressed a desire to receive funding to work with youth at all risk levels to allow for work with lower-risk siblings of enrolled youth to be counted as BEST programming.

    - Many programs funded under the case management service area expressed that the current funding levels are too low to provide the amount and intensity of case management currently expected through the BEST Program.

    - Programs also expressed a need for increased funding to account for significant inflation over the last year.

- **Evaluation**

- ○ Many programs noted how it can be difficult to comply with evaluation requirements when tools are rolled out very late in the program year and when instructions are only shared with executive staff and have to be relayed to the direct service staff.

- ○ One program also noted how some tools can be invasive for youth citing the questions asking if they have been to jail or if they are on probation.

- ○ One program also expressed an interest in creatively thinking about other ways to collect information on outcomes without using the surveys, such as quicker, smaller activities that are more conversational for youth.

- **Services**

  - ○ Youth suggested a variety of improvements including, additional field trips and community service opportunities, additional discussion topics on working, better snacks and office decor/decorations, speakers for karaoke and music, additional breaks, flexible group offerings (i.e., additional times and hybrid options), scholarships, allowing previous clients to be mentors, and going back to pre-pandemic services and products.

- **Strategic Decision Making**

  - ○ More opportunities for BEST programs to be involved in strategic discussions, including the direction of the BEST Program approach, the RFQ process, and decisions on what agencies get funded. For example, one program suggested utilizing youth-serving community organizations as part of the selection process as they are closest to the work and best understand the needs of youth in their communities.