



City of Knoxville Summer Youth Opportunity Grants Impact Report

2021



Prepared By:
Emily Norris



From the Mayor

This past year, youth in our city - particularly East Knoxville - have experienced heartbreak and tragedy related to violence, compounded by the stress of a global pandemic. All young people in our city deserve to grow and thrive in safe, supportive communities, and our Summer Youth Opportunity Grants are a step toward making this happen. Reducing youth violence will be a collaborative and community-led effort, and I am proud to see the work our youth-serving organizations have done to provide young people in Knoxville with diverse paid summer opportunities in programs offering art, athletics, writing, construction, music, and more.

Summer employment programs have been effective at reducing violence and increasing opportunities for youth in other cities, and I am proud to fund similar initiatives in Knoxville. Summer Youth Opportunity Grant awardees have already been serving our most at-risk youth, some of them for many years, and these grants were able to build upon the capacity of programs already developed and engage more youth in the community. The purpose of the City of Knoxville's Empower Knox Initiative is to build successful life outcomes for all Knoxville's youth, and I am proud to see that goal reflected in the work Summer Youth Opportunity Grant awardees have completed this summer with our youth.



Indya Kincannon
Mayor, City of Knoxville



CITY OF KNOXVILLE



Why Community Empowerment?

The concept of empowerment is about ensuring that communities have the tools and resources necessary for them to thrive and be self-sufficient. The Summer Youth Opportunity Grant is the epitome of what Community Empowerment is all about.

The youth of our city have shown tremendous tenacity and resolve over the past year. Faced with challenge after challenge and heartbreak after heartbreak, they have persevered and have renewed the hope of a city paralyzed by senseless acts of violence. When faced with how we might respond and what could make the most significant impact, this grant began to take shape.

The implementation of this grant empowered youth and young adults across our community to gain invaluable experience and relationships that will be of benefit for years to come. It empowered the non-profits and small businesses that work day in and day out to serve the most vulnerable to meet their goals and objectives, and build capacity in the process. It empowered parents and guardians because they didn't have to worry about their children or their whereabouts. True community empowerment is about empowering everyone and ensuring that no person or entity is left out.

The Community Empowerment Department, through the Empower Knox Initiative, looks to continue this program, as well as others, that will pour into our young people. We remain committed to ensuring their success despite the unfortunate circumstances with which they may be presented. Our charge is to equip them with the means to be empowered that they in turn may empower others. I am hopeful, and excited for what the future holds for our young people and this program.

Why Community Empowerment?

Because empowered communities change lives, and make our city a better place to call home.

Dr. Charles F. Lomax, Jr.
Community Empowerment Director
City of Knoxville



From the Program Directors

The Summer Youth Opportunity Grant program provided a wonderful avenue for connecting youth and young adults with programs designed to nurture their talents, learn new skills, and build valuable relationships. We believe when people are connected to a community they become accountable to that community, and that community must be accountable to them. For some members of our community, the connections to resources and supports that can help them thrive are limited or non-existent.

For some young people, exposure to violence and lack of involvement in educational and enrichment activities make them vulnerable to involvement in violence. While these young people face significant challenges, there is a significant opportunity for us, as a community, to create opportunities and relationships that will support their safety and success. The SYOG program was an opportunity for youth serving organizations to think creatively about ways to engage opportunity youth.

Participating youth and young adults were able to have the costs of program participation covered and/or earn stipends. Most importantly, participating youth and grant awardees had opportunities to build lasting relationships and develop connections that lead to stronger communities. We are grateful for the grant awardees who provided innovative programming and worked diligently to engage opportunity youth. We are grateful to parents, relatives, teachers, service providers, and so many others

who supported connecting young people to opportunities. We are most grateful to the youth and young adults who opened themselves up to these experiences, shared their talents and ideas, and grew their tribe. We looking forward to experiencing how programs continue to serve and youth continue to grow.

LaKenya Middlebrook, Community Safety Director, City of Knoxville



"IT IS GOING TO TAKE EVERYONE"

You and I have a role to play in this multifaceted issue. No one person or entity can embody all the solutions to decrease the violence we are seeing in our communities. As we look to collaborate and coordinate efforts with community partners to seek space to plan, strategize, build trust and heal, we realize that change will not take place over night. It is going to take time. However as we reimagine what public safety looks like, this Summer we provided intentional opportunities for, not just high performing youth but also high potential youth or “opportunity youth” to be engaged and involved in non-traditional ways. Our youth are our present not just in time but they are our presents or gifts. It is our duty to make sure they have a thriving future. They deserve to live, play and exist in communities without being held captive with the fear of “normalized” violence. Our children are priority, our families are priority and the safety of our communities are non-negotiable.

Kathy Mack, Community Engagement Manager, City of Knoxville





"Through working with this cohort of students, we learned that many of our young people need creative outlets, and with the right guidance they will soar."

- Sew It Sell It, The Bottom



Participating Organizations

5th Woman
The Bottom - Sew It Sell It
Canvas Can Do Miracles
Drums Up Guns Down
Karate Five Association
MCA Sports
MYNARK Tribe, Inc.
Penultimate Development
SEED
Sols Write House
YWCA



"All of the young people in the program have known a young person that died due to violence in the last year. It is important for them to find and use their voices to create change in their communities and help others see the struggle they deal with to stay out of situations where violence can potentially happen. These young people were looking for new ways to share their stories and new methods for dealing with racism and separation."

- The 5th Woman



281 Youth Served

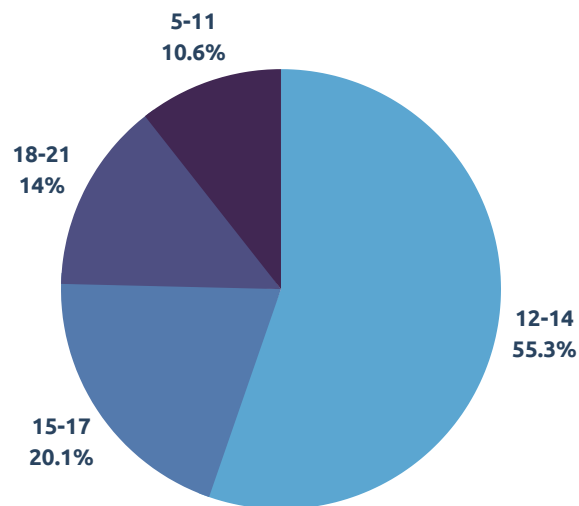


"Many teens are wandering our streets making bad decisions trying to have a social experience. Art, dance, writing, chess, etc. programs are the keys to the young opportunity youth's future. "

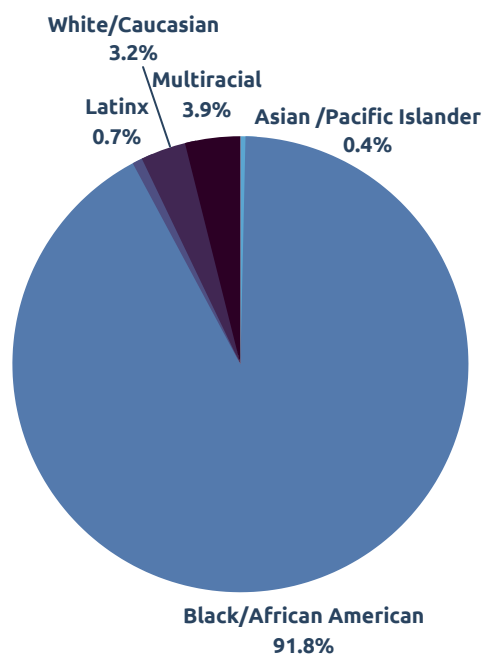
**- Jackie Holloway
Executive Director,
Canvas Can Do
Miracles**

Demographics

Summer Youth Opportunity Grant
(SYOG) programs sought to be
gender inclusive



More than half of SYOG program participants were between the ages of 12 and 14, though programs served youth ages 5 - 21



SYOG Program participants were predominantly Black or African American youth living in East Knoxville

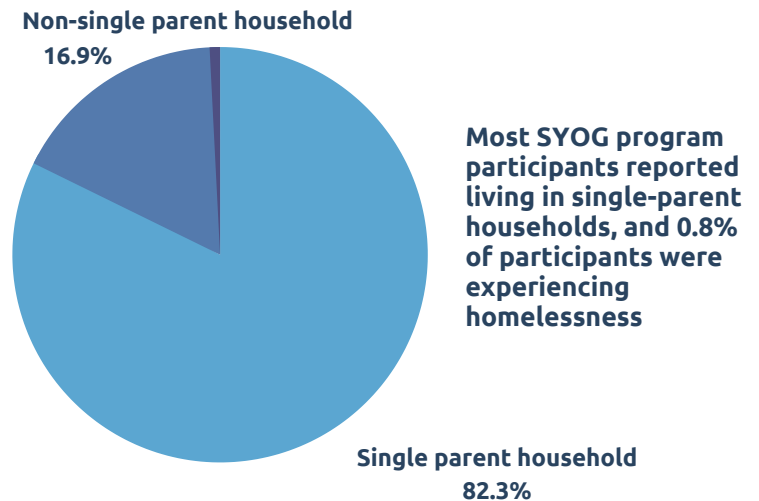
East - 74.4%
West - 5.7%
South - 8.8%
North - 11.1%



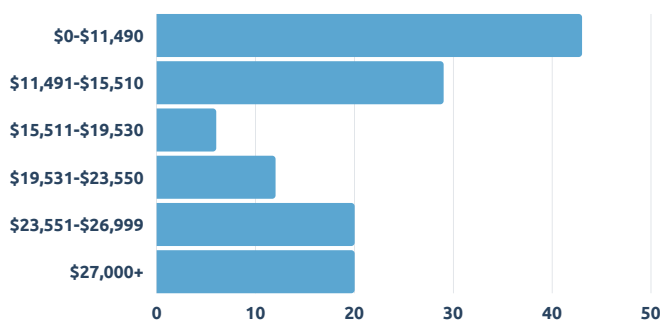
Poverty and Violence

Though direct causes of youth violence are interrelated and often complicated to pinpoint, researchers and community members alike identify poverty as a major contributor to violence.¹

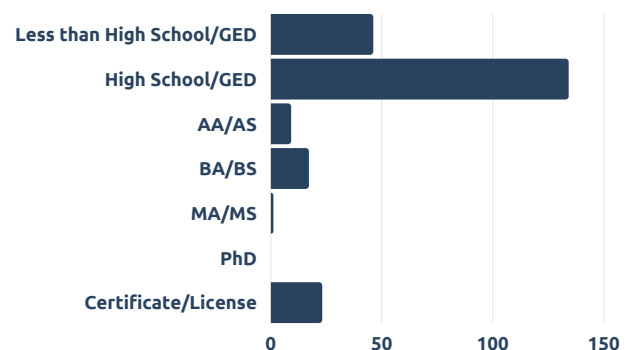
In Knoxville, nearly 43% of Black/African American residents were living at or below the poverty level in 2015 compared to 21% of Whites in Knoxville.² Additionally, more young people under the age of 18 lived at or below the poverty level when compared to those aged 18-64 and 65 years of age and older.³



2015 U.S. Census Bureau data also show that in Knoxville, 40.7% of those with less than a high school diploma experienced poverty, compared to 6.3% of those with a graduate or professional degree.⁴ The majority of SYOG youth participants lived in households experiencing poverty with parents or guardians who achieved a high school diploma as their highest level of education.



Household Income of SYOG Participants



Highest Level of Education of Parents/Guardians of SYOG Participants

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) youth violence is a major public health concern that has profound and often lifelong impacts on an individual's psychological and social well-being.⁵ Young people who become involved in violence often do not see education as a viable path for them to gain status or advancement in life, and turn to riskier but perhaps more familiar paths.⁶

¹ Poverty and Violence. Robert D. Crutchfield and Tim Wadsworth. International Handbook of Violence Research, 2003

^{2,3,4} Key Findings: 2017 Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee Needs Assessment. University of Tennessee College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service, 2017

^{5,6} Understanding youth violence: The mediating effects of gender, poverty and vulnerability. Lesley McAra & Susan McVie. Journal of Criminal Justice. 2016

Connecting with Opportunity Youth

Summer Youth Opportunity Grants aimed to reach youth with a proven risk of violence, which are often those experiencing poverty, and offer paid opportunities through youth-serving organizations already working in communities. Data show those efforts in reaching these youth were successful, and accomplished in various ways by the participating programs.

"We had 16 students in the program, of whom 4 were Austin-East High School students who were in school the day of the shooting in the bathroom. Several students were homeless, of whom one was breaking free from a gang and had most likely been involved in violence and selling drugs."

- SEED

"The majority of the 100+ youth who have attended after school and summer programs at the Phyllis Wheatley Center in the past two years are Opportunity Youth.

These young people, living both at- and in-risk, seek academic support and a safe space for recreation and physical activity. YWCA's trauma-responsive framework is essential in this work." - YWCA



"To reach youth who were at risk or already disconnected from family, school and society- and/or who were already going through the juvenile justice system; First, we sought out youth from amongst our immediate family, relatives, and friends. Next, we collaborated with community organizations that were already empowering youth. We participated in Youth Rallies and Marches throughout Knoxville neighborhoods that are prone to violence. While joining and participating in these violence interrupting protests, we held open enrollment into the MYNARK Forever Summer program."

- MYNARK Tribe, Inc.

Do Summer Jobs Reduce Youth Violence?

Spotlight: Chicago's *One Summer Chicago Plus* Program

The Summer Youth Violence Prevention Pilot Program in Knoxville is still being assessed for long-term effectiveness, but results of research completed in Chicago showed that youth who participated in summer employment opportunities and mentorship through *One Summer Chicago Plus* had lower rates of violent-crime arrests throughout the following year.⁷

Results indicated that the decrease in violent-crime arrests is not simply an “incapacitation” effect of youth having less free time to engage in crime over the summer: Most of the reduction in violent-crime arrests occurred after the end of the program. The decline persisted 13 months later, suggesting that youths’ summer experiences impacted their behavior after the program.⁸

Similar programs in New York City, Louisville, Kentucky, and Houston have also shown promising results, pairing employment with social and emotional support for youth with a proven risk of violence.⁹

Opportunity Youth funding at the federal level is only available to youth who are already disconnected from school or work, but successful programs are showing that prevention works, and summer employment programs can have lasting effects on violence.



"Opportunity Youths' parents reported that their child's confidence level increased as well as their skill, attitude and behavior."

- MYNARK Tribe, Inc.

^{7,8} *Summer Jobs Reduce Violence Among Youth Facing Barriers to Opportunity in the United States.* Sara Heller, Marianne Bertrand, Jonathan M V. Davis

⁹ *The Effects of Youth Employment: Evidence from New York City Summer Youth Employment Program Lotteries.* Gelber, A., Isen, A., & Kessler, J. 2014. NBER Working Paper Series.

Beyond job training, youth learned valuable life skills in leadership, social-emotional well-being, and teamwork.

"Our opportunity youth led pledges every day that promoted unity, discipline, confidence, and encouraged being leaders."

- Obayana Ajanaku
Executive Director
Drums Up Guns Down



"Our youth counselors participated in hands-on training that equipped them with the skills to teach West African drum and dance classes and lead social-emotional learning (SEL) groups with camp participants. Each morning camp participants took part in SEL techniques, which helped youth with making better decisions, responsible choices, and how to stay focused. All SEL group activities were youth led." - Obayana Ajanaku

"Penultimate Development was very effective in engaging youth in a healthy, professional, and productive lifestyle that will enable them to live a self-sustaining life. **Currently all opportunity youth are working full time jobs and completing a series of workshops, seminars, and other activities aimed at helping them become self sufficient and future community leaders.**"

- Diondre Jackson
CEO and Founder
Penultimate Development



Skills Learned cont.

"Youth in our Reach program learn conflict management, time management, benefits of vocational training, opportunities for future education, academic and study skills, work skills, community connections, service learning, and work experience." - YWCA

"We had several lawyers from the Knoxville Bar Association come and teach about the judicial system and gave students a tour of a law office and the courts in the City-County building. The students spent half of their time on career readiness skills and then split between the building job site and community engagement. This gave them a taste of the 2 boot camps they could choose after the summer program was finished."

- Stan Johnson
Executive Director, SEED

Additional Skills:

- Sewing
- Writing
- Fishing
- Karate
- Artistic Expression
- West African Drum
- Entrepreneurship
- Preparing for art exhibitions
- Team building
- Goal setting
- Time Management
- Event Planning
- Basic life and job skills
- Expectations of a work environment
- Effective communication with others
- Training in advanced leadership
- Sales and financial literacy



What Works?

Youth living in predominately Black or African American communities experiencing high levels of poverty and crime need policies and programs designed for their unique history and experiences.¹⁰ The CDC's Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence recommends the following interventions: Strengthening Youth's Skills, Connecting Youth to Caring Adults and Activities, Creating Protective Community Environments, and Intervening to Lessen Harms and Prevent Future Risks.¹¹ These interventions were implemented by SYOG awardees throughout their programming.

"We have learned that one of the primary reasons for the success of Opportunity Youth in the Penultimate Development program can be attributed to providing a safe and healthy environment away from the stress and anxiety that exist in poverty-stricken areas. Once OY relocate for 10 months to Jefferson City from East- Knoxville they quickly adjust to working full time jobs, paying bills, saving money, and other program responsibilities."

Diondre Jackson, CEO and founder, Penultimate Development

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Because many factors have contributed to circumstances youth find themselves in today, multiple systems must be addressed to create supportive environments for them to thrive. Youth today in East Knoxville continue to be impacted by the effects of Urban Renewal, intergenerational poverty, and community violence that continues to retraumatize them. Consistent and collaborative systems of support will create environments to allow opportunity youth to reach their full potential. Youth rely on adults in their lives to be trustworthy and work together in their best interests, and the opportunity to thrive can only occur in the presence of trusting relationships.



SYOG awardees and program leaders have been essential in creating or extending innovative and fun opportunities for youth this summer. They have formed bonds and relationships that will promote stronger and safer communities for youth.

¹⁰ McCrea, K. T., Richards, M., Quimby, D., Scott, D., Davis, L., Hart, S., Thomas, A., & Hopson, S. (2019). Understanding violence and developing resilience with African American youth in high-poverty, high-crime communities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 99, 296–307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.018>

¹¹ David-Ferdon, C., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Dahlberg, L. L., Marshall, K. J., Rainford, N. & Hall, J. E. (2016). *A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Where do we go from here?

"With the people in Knoxville coming together we could help stop the gun violence. Just being able to know that I helped resolve gun violence and I helped kids stay off the street. Keeping the young kids off the streets help stop the gun violence."

- SYOG Program Participant



Objectives Met, Lessons Learned

The SYOG pilot program accomplished goals of collaborating with community organizations and engaging Opportunity Youth in innovative paid opportunities. A total of \$200,000 was allocated for this pilot program. Thirteen organizations were selected for funding, and eleven organizations participated in the program. Future SYOG programs would begin planning and implementation earlier in the year to allow ample time for awardees and the city to ensure all requirements are in place for funding to be released.

The 11 participating programs for 2021 created unique opportunities for youth during the summer months when some might otherwise be disconnected from support and community. As the summer program ended, youth were segued to after-school programming or employment either within or outside the organization they were engaged with. Leaders of grant-funded organizations have advocated for future summer grant funding to continue extending paid opportunities to youth with a proven risk of becoming a victim of or perpetrating violence.

Empower Knox Community Partnerships

A goal of the pilot SYOG program was to strengthen collaboration with and between the City of Knoxville and local organizations providing programming that advances Violence Interruption objectives. This work will continue through the **Empower Knox Community Partnerships**. Five local youth-serving organizations are receiving support from the City of Knoxville, Alliance for Better Nonprofits, and volunteer students from the UT Macro Social Work Student Network in order to build their capacity to serve more youth and increase their grant-readiness. The City is proud to partner with the following organizations:



Canvas Can Do Miracles
Gold Key Access*

Drums Up Guns Down
Sols Write House

Y.O.V.E.M.E.N.T.*

*did not apply for SYOG pilot program

“The cycle of violence doesn't stop after Summer ends

It continues to recycle back without a consistent effective battle plan to meet and discourage this type of behavior.

We believe the effectiveness of these grants should start earlier which allows grant recipients the opportunity to be better prepared, more efficient planning and ability to reach others before Summer begins or even all year round. Telling someone you care especially our youth is one thing but actually showing and helping them meet their needs by giving them options creates trust and positivity in their lives is another. When you see the difference for yourself, you know there has been an impact in the ones you've tried to reach.

Without this type of help such as the City provided through this SYOG grant, we reach fewer youth and the cycle of violence and lack of hope continues. We have to continue impacting our community through viable outreach in programs we understand work."

- Willie G. Wilson

President, Karate Five Association

