



「**BOLD VISION**」

BRIGHTER FUTURES:
THE BOLD VISION YOUTH THRIVING SURVEY
SEPTEMBER 2025



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Land Acknowledgment

We stand together to acknowledge those who stood, lived, worked, fought, died and loved on these lands now called the continent of North America. We stand together to acknowledge that these lands existed prior to occupation. We acknowledge that there were people who resided on these lands since time immemorial, prior to it being called Los Angeles.

We acknowledge the beautiful and brutal realities of these unceded lands and their collective narrative. We acknowledge the Indigenous people who are documented as the people called Gabrieleño Tongva of San Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians, Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians, Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, Tejon Indian Tribe, Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians, and San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, and those whose names we do not know who were here on these lands prior to the U.S. occupation. These lands are also the inter-tribal trade lands, and are under the stewardship, of over 200 California peoples who reside alongside us. We acknowledge and offer deep gratitude to Tovaangar – the land and waters on which we stand upon – and its traditional caretakers, their ancestors, elders, and relations past, present, and future.

We stand together in acknowledgement of the beautiful and the brutal realities of those souls of African descent who arrived from that continent. We recognize those that worked under the realities of the brutal chattel slavery system to build this nation. We acknowledge their contributions to the economic

realities of this county through their labor as domestic servants, laborers, and farmers; the same people who led many uprisings.

We acknowledge the beautiful and brutal realities of those who are Chicanx, Latinx, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Caribbean and more. We acknowledge their migration, displacement, and continued resistance to colonization. We give gratitude to their contributions, which are now inter-woven into the history of this place.

We stand together in acknowledgement of the beautiful and the brutal realities of those who arrived from the continent of Asia. We see those who arrived by boat as sailors, builders, and textile workers to contribute to the infrastructure and industries of this county. We acknowledge the contribution of those that arrived as immigrants and refugees seeking sanctuary and safety.

We acknowledge the beautiful and brutal realities of those who arrived from the Pacific Islands. We acknowledge their contribution to our communities and their fight against being invisibilized and against colonization.

We acknowledge that we have come together from our various directions, standing on these sacred lands, symbolically standing on the shoulders of our Ancestors. We have come together to honor who we are and whose we are. We have come together understanding that we should know the history of these lands in order to create new realities on these lands today. We have come to join together our voices, unite our forces, and liberate our people.

Acknowledgments



We would like to thank all the people who played a role in the development and implementation of the Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey and the creation of this report.

First, we want to acknowledge the young people that supported the development of the survey and the interpretation of the survey findings. This includes the Bold Vision Youth Council and the young people who participated in group interviews during the survey development process.

In addition to the Youth Council, we would like to thank the Bold Vision Community Council and Steering Committee. Their input and feedback were helpful in the development of the survey and the recommendations included in this report.

We would also like to thank the Survey Advisory Group for their work in helping to develop the survey and in providing feedback on early versions of the report. We would also like to thank Imoyase Community Support Services and the Community Health Equity Group for their contributions to designing and implementing the Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey. Cheryl Grills, Ph.D., Sandra Villanueva, Ph.D., Elia De La Cruz Toledo He, Ph.D., Peter Rej, Ph.D., Diane Terry, Ph.D., and other staff at

Imoyase Community Support Services conducted the literature review for the survey and led the design of the survey questionnaire and sampling plan. Jason Douglas, Ph.D. (UC Irvine), Andy Subica, Ph.D. (UC Riverside), Aerika Loyd, Ph.D. (UC Riverside), and University of California Irvine (UCI) graduate researchers led the data collection and received Institutional Review Board approval for the survey implementation from UCI.

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Introduction

Since its inception, Bold Vision has remained committed to the idea that all youth in Los Angeles County deserve to thrive. At the heart of this vision is a fundamental understanding that youth thriving is not only about individual outcomes—it is about the conditions, systems, and opportunities that make those outcomes possible. Unfortunately, discriminatory systems, policies and practices in L.A. County create deep inequalities that hinder the chances that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous or people of color) youth can thrive. These impediments did not happen by accident and are the result of choices and decisions of those in power, including local elected officials and systems leaders. The disparities BIPOC youth face have been well documented in previous research, including the [Bold Vision Mid-Term Report](#), which examined racial and geographic inequities across 19 key indicators. But what remained missing was a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how young people themselves perceive their own well-being, and the complex factors that contribute to or inhibit their ability to thrive.

The Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey (BVYTS) aims to fill that gap. The survey uplifts the voices of young people and provides a better understanding of the factors influencing their lives—directly from their perspectives. Through collaboration with more than 40 youth-serving community-based organizations (CBOs), the survey reached a diverse and large sample of young people across L.A. County. The survey offers invaluable insight into what youth need to thrive, and where change is most urgently needed.

BIPOC youth thriving is the cornerstone of the Bold Vision framework, and the survey findings underscore the importance of intentionally centering BIPOC youth in all systems-change efforts. This data is critical not only because it provides a more accurate picture of how BIPOC youth are actually doing, but because it highlights the components that are essential for their well-being—and the interconnections between them. By surfacing youth perspectives and elevating their lived experiences, we provide a powerful tool for advocates, policymakers, and community leaders committed to building a more equitable Los Angeles.

This report starts with a survey overview that includes information on what the survey measured, how it was distributed, and who completed it. Next, the report provides a brief section on our methodology for analyzing the survey findings. The bulk of the report is the survey findings section that provides key findings for the two survey outcome measures—psychological distress and self-efficacy/hope for the future—followed by key findings for the factors that most influenced these outcomes. The report concludes with recommendations derived from the key findings and stakeholder input.

In order to create a county where all youth can thrive, we must first listen. This report reflects that commitment and charts a path forward grounded in data, driven by young voices, and focused on transformation.

What is Bold Vision?

Bold Vision is a multi-sector, multi-generational initiative that aims to fundamentally improve the lives of a generation of BIPOC children and youth, creating lasting change in our communities by expanding paths towards success for young people across L.A. County. Bold Vision's central goal is to promote BIPOC youth thriving. To accomplish this goal, Bold Vision develops youth leadership and builds youth-led systems change campaigns.

Bold Vision is led by the Bold Vision Youth Council, consisting of young people from throughout the county, that serves as the primary decision-making body. The Bold Vision Youth Council also provides strategic guidance and direction for the initiative. Furthermore, the Youth Council develops and manages systems change campaigns including a youth mental health campaign and an economic justice campaign. In addition to the Youth Council, Bold Vision has a Steering Committee consisting of a subset of Youth Council members along with adult

allies from youth organizing and youth development organizations, that informs and promotes alignment across Bold Vision's strategy and execution.

The Steering Committee is the successor to the Bold Vision Community Council, which consisted of 13 youth-serving organizations from throughout the county. The Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI), under the guidance of the Youth Council and Steering Committee, serves as the anchor organization for Bold Vision. In this capacity, SJLI manages and oversees the initiative. SJLI also works closely with JADE Strategy Consultants, which supports Bold Vision Youth Council programming. Catalyst California also supports Bold Vision as its lead research consultant. Catalyst California was the lead author of the Bold Vision Mid-Term Report and is the lead author of this report.



Defining youth thriving

"To me, thriving is feeling comfortable in who I am and feeling supported by those around me, but also in my community and knowing that they have my back. So [having] different opportunities...and meeting other people who are interested in what you're interested in. I feel like that's thriving...feeling comfortable and being who you are in your community is thriving." - Alex Malleis Sternberg, Youth Council member

Youth thriving includes several dimensions that all contribute to youth reaching their fullest potential. Beyond their physical and emotional health, it extends to all aspects of their life, including social relationships and financial health. It also extends across environments in their lives: youth thrive when they are supported in their homes, schools, jobs, and communities.

Bold Vision developed a holistic definition based on prior research and cultural grounding in the context of BIPOC youth by reviewing the literature, engaging subject matter experts, and speaking with young people. Together, these sources revealed that several different constructs make up the potential for youth to thrive. They ranged from individual

factors, such as strong mental or physical health, to environmental and relational factors, including well-resourced, vibrant communities and supportive personal relationships.¹ Importantly, we include systemic factors in our definition, specifically equity, inclusion, and safety in public and private spaces for all youth identities—because for youth to thrive, they must be welcomed, included, respected, and safe in the world around them.

In its broadest form, youth thriving is a state where youth are fully supported in every aspect of their lives where:

- their minds and bodies flourish
- they have strength in their identities and hope for their future
- they have strong families and relationships to rely on
- their communities are fully resourced
- their physical environments are safe and healthy
- they have the freedom to experience fun and happiness
- they feel strength and pride in their cultural and spiritual identities
- they experience equity and inclusion in all spaces
- they have agency to shape their communities



Survey overview

In August 2022, Catalyst California started to develop the BvyTS in partnership with subject matter experts, young people, and CBOs. The BvyTS questionnaire and sampling strategy were developed through a community-engaged process, drawing on existing youth thriving measures, findings from youth interviews and prior research, and guidance from Bold Vision's former Community Council alongside the Survey Advisory Group—a collaborative of youth development and survey experts co-facilitated by Imoyase Community Support

Services (ICSS) and Catalyst California. ICSS, Catalyst California, and the Survey Advisory Group reviewed over 40 youth-focused surveys and research articles to develop the sampling strategy and analyzed nearly two dozen literature sources to define youth thriving. Additionally, ICSS conducted six group interviews with 70 young people across the county to ensure the BvyTS defined and measured youth thriving through the lens of BIPOC youth.

In partnership with the Community Health Equity Group (CHE Group), out of the University of California Irvine and Riverside, Bold Vision collected more than three thousand survey responses between October 2023 and June 2024. Bold Vision worked with over 40 youth-serving CBOs to gather as representative a sample as possible of L.A. County, with an emphasis on BIPOC youth. This study was approved by the University of California Irvine Institutional Review Board.

WHAT IT MEASURED

The BvyTS asked 62 questions over seven different components of youth thriving. The survey also included 15 demographic questions to measure differences in youth thriving across and within youth subgroups. Some of these included race, immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identification, age, housing status, criminal legal system involvement, and employment/education status. Catalyst California and ICSS modified items from existing validated instruments and developed new ones. We prioritized topics not available in the existing public data.



The Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey Components



KEY TERMS

The report refers to the following key terms. Each of these refers to key factors, within the seven components of youth thriving, that the BGYTS specifically measured and found to be significant outcomes or drivers of youth thriving.

Psychological Distress: A measure of poor mental health characterized by symptoms of anxiety and depression, including feeling nervous, restless, worthless, and hopeless

Self-Efficacy: Confidence in one's own ability to handle life's daily tasks and unexpected challenges

Hope for the Future: Optimism about what lies ahead and belief that good things are coming

Caring Families and Relationships: The stable, caring relationships young people have with adults, family, or peers in their communities or schools in good and bad times

Opportunities for Community Involvement: Having opportunities to get involved in one's community

Microaggression: Interpersonal racism that occurs in individual interactions through subtle insults, comments, or even compliments that communicate derogatory perceptions about a person's race, gender, immigration status, or other identities based on individual and systemic bias

Structural Racism: A form of racism that occurs through public and private systems that mutually reinforce and foster racial inequities through their governance, policies, and practices, maintaining the status quo in resource distribution

Cultural Identity: The connectedness and positive regard young people have toward their racial or ethnic identity, including any shared traditions, values, spiritual/religious beliefs, or practices

Sparks: Passions, interests, or hobbies that bring joy, energy, and a sense of purpose in life.



HOW IT WAS DISTRIBUTED

The Bvyts used a hybrid sampling approach to recruit young people. We combined stratified and snowball sampling to reduce selection bias and increase the likelihood of engaging enough young people, particularly those who are hard to reach. Bold Vision randomly selected CBOs to distribute the survey to their youth leaders or participants. These leaders then invited their friends to complete the survey. Bold Vision originally selected 35 CBOs from a total of 313 youth-serving organizations in the county, of which 24 agreed to participate.

CBOs were split into different strata, or subgroups, based on their geographic region or target population served. For target population served, we identified populations to prioritize in the sample to help ensure we surveyed a critical number of young people in groups that are often underrepresented in surveys, e.g., Asian American/Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black boys/men, LGBTQ+, unhoused, foster, or justice-involved youth. The number of CBOs randomly selected from each stratum was determined by its proportion of county youth and the capacity of CBOs. If a selected CBO declined to participate, another organization was selected from the same stratum.

Throughout survey distribution, we monitored respondent demographics to flag if additional CBOs had to be sampled to reach the target number of young people in each demographic group. By the end of the survey period, Bold Vision partnered with 41 CBOs to reach youth in L.A. County. In addition to the CBO sampling method, Bold Vision distributed the survey at eight community events.

Catalyst California and CHE Group provided CBOs technical assistance in distributing the survey. They were also given base and bonus stipends based on the number of surveys they collected. Young people who completed the survey were emailed a \$10 gift card. Those who invited their peers to participate were eligible for additional incentives. Youth ages 18 and over provided electronic consent prior to participating in the survey

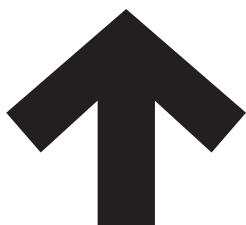
whereas those under 18 had to receive passive parent consent, meaning their parent did not object to their participation. Youth under 18 had to provide a parent/guardian's email address before participating. Parents/guardians could opt out their child from the survey within seven days. Surveys were completed online and shared with youth via web links and QR codes.

WHO TOOK THE SURVEY

Bold Vision collected 3,444 surveys from a diverse sample of L.A. County youth.² The majority were youth of color (88.9%), nearly one in five (20.3%) identified as LGBTQIA+, and more than one in 10 (12.3%) had been unhoused or in temporary housing over the past year.

The Bvyts marks an incredible opportunity to understand the extent to which BIPOC, queer, and other underrepresented youth are thriving in the county. The Bvyts surveyed higher rates of Black, AIAN, and NHIPI youth compared to their percentages in the county population, and the Bvyts reached similar percentages of Asian and Latine youth compared to their county percentages.³ About 5.5% of the Bvyts participants identify as transgender or nonbinary. Other youth surveys project transgender or nonbinary young people comprise 1.8% of county youth.⁴ The survey oversampled youth in the South L.A. Service Planning Area (SPA 6), where 12.8% of youth in the county live. Comparatively, about 29.7% of survey participants live in SPA 6.

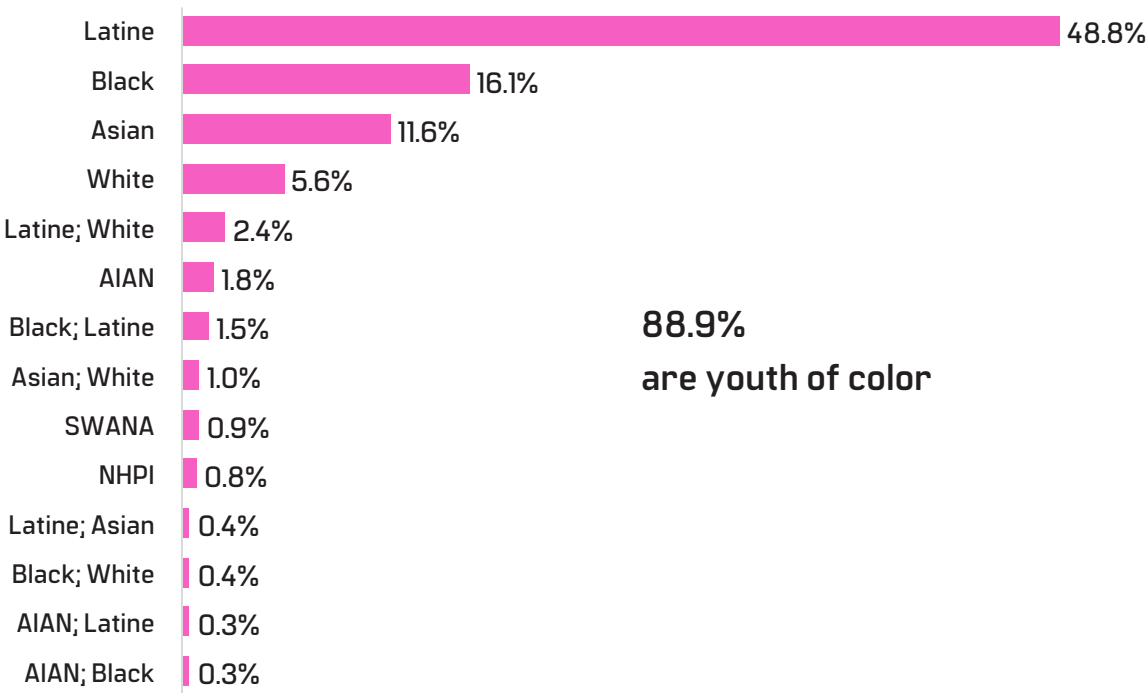
The Bvyts achieved its intent to reach and prioritize the voices of BIPOC and underrepresented youth often overlooked in research. Our methods did under-sample other youth groups. The survey had fewer White youth compared to the county.⁵ It also underrepresented the San Fernando (SPA 2) and San Gabriel (SPA 3) regions.⁶ To adjust for any bias in the sample and ensure our estimates represented the geographic diversity of the participants, all estimates in this report are weighted by age, sex at birth, SPA, and race.



The Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey represents the diversity of L.A. County youth.

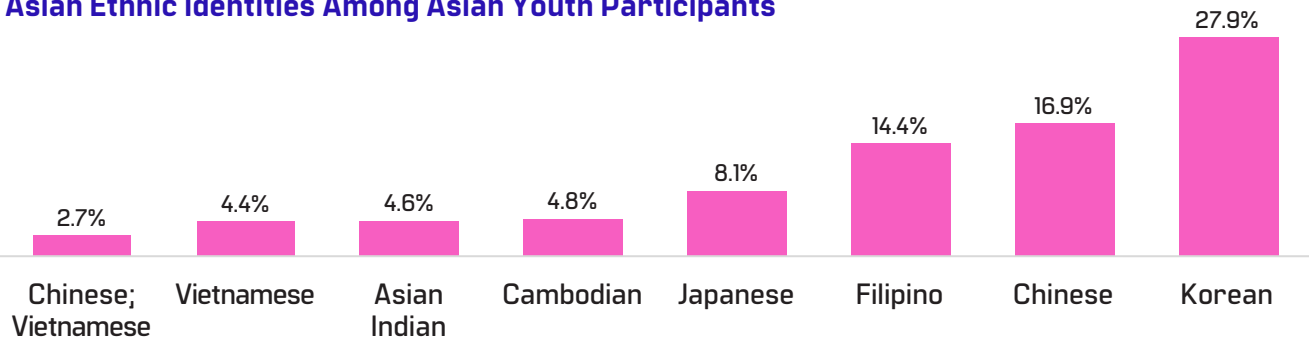
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS ARE RACIALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE.

Top 15 Racial Identities Among Survey Participants



ASIAN YOUTH PARTICIPANTS HAVE DIFFERENT ETHNIC IDENTITIES.

Top 9 Asian Ethnic Identities Among Asian Youth Participants



THEY HAVE DIFFERENT SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITIES.



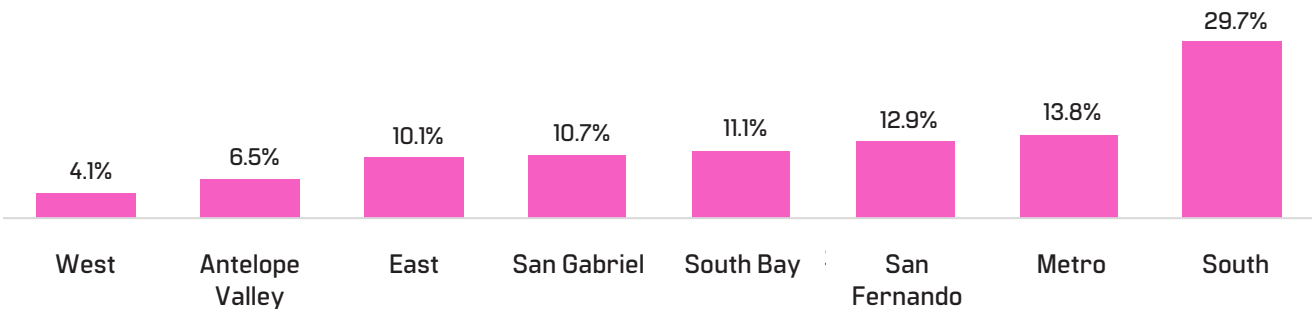
MOST ARE STUDENTS

Survey Participants by Education and Employment Status



THEY ARE FROM DIFFERENT COUNTY REGIONS.

Survey Participants by L.A. County Service Planning Area




MANY ARE AFFECTED BY FAILURES IN THE HOUSING, IMMIGRATION, AND LEGAL SYSTEMS.




12.3%

were homeless or stayed in temporary housing in the past year




4.1%

have temporary or non-citizen immigration status



13.3%

have at some point spent time in foster care, juvenile halls or probation camps, jail or prison, or group homes



14.4%

have at some point been suspended, expelled, or subject to other disciplinary actions at school



Methods in Brief

Catalyst California analyzed the BVYTS data through a community-engaged research process. Youth Council members participated in two input sessions: one to identify the most relevant research questions and one to make sense of the survey findings. Catalyst California also held one session with the former Community Council, one with the Steering Committee, and two with the Survey Advisory Group to receive further advice on the research questions and context for the observed findings. Sessions were held between October 2024 and April 2025. Throughout the report, quotes from Youth Council members bring young people's experiences to life and ground the findings in their voices.

Report methods aimed to identify (1) the primary drivers of youth thriving and (2) how youth fare across these drivers. The primary purpose was to identify starting points for policy change. We first analyzed the frequency of every survey item across most youth demographic characteristics. Then, we used factor analysis, a type of statistical test that helps explain underlying relationships, to identify which survey items measured similar youth thriving components, and which of those items most influenced those components. For example, the BVYTS included six items about strength and pride in culture that our factor analysis proved to measure wholistically a shared component of cultural identity. Findings from these tests supported most original components in Bold Vision's youth thriving definition. Catalyst California focused on the strongest and most reliable aspects of the components based on

the factor analysis, e.g., within the BVYTS component "Strong Mental Health and Minds", the subcomponent "Psychological Distress" had the most reliable and strongest items.

Catalyst California then used the factor analysis results to create average expected scores across each validated component. Average component scores are visualized through circular bar charts throughout the report. They represent the average expected score for each group based on the survey items collected and the underlying, validated component. Catalyst California then completed structural equation models based on these components. These are layered equations designed to predict outcomes in one area based on other characteristics measured in the survey. Based on feedback from the Youth Council, Catalyst California focused on predicting two youth outcomes: psychological distress and self-efficacy and hope for the future. Our findings focus on these two outcomes as well as the components and characteristics that have a statistically significant and measurable effect on those outcomes. In other words, the relationship between the outcome and components is unlikely to be due to chance and is substantial enough to have a meaningful impact on youth thriving.

Throughout the report, bar charts illustrate how different components and characteristics influence young people and the variation by youth subgroups. To make the findings more relatable, we highlight the questions and components that show the strongest effects on youth outcomes. For example, the "Caring Families and Relationships" subcomponent had among



the biggest effects on self-efficacy and hope for the future. The report highlights key findings in this subcomponent and focuses on this most influential question: "When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me."

RACE, ETHNICITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Disaggregating data by race, gender, sexuality, immigration, and other characteristics is essential to creating conditions where all youth thrive. How public and private systems serve youth is not color-blind or unbiased. Our criminal legal system more harshly punishes youth of color, and health care systems fall short in serving LGBTQIA+ youth. The report presents findings by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identification (SOGI), immigration status, criminal legal system involvement, and housing status. We explore how different youth subgroups are faring in the county as a starting point for policymakers and practitioners. However, we only include limited examples of how intersectionality affects youth experiences.

How young people experience their environments extends past a single identity. Their racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, immigration, and other identities together influence the resources and experiences they have throughout childhood and adulthood because of oppression. Intersectionality accounts for how people with multiple, or intersectional, identities experience greater oppression than any single identity viewed in isolation. In other words, the interaction of marginalized identities means even greater oppression than any identity viewed as mutually exclusive, e.g., the compounding experience of racism and sexism for Black women.⁷ To account for this, we show additional data for youth subgroups with the lowest outcomes to detail how experiences may vary based on other identities, which just begins to demonstrate how intersectionality influences resources and outcomes. For instance, we include data by race for LGBTQIA+ youth to show how experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community varies by other identities affected by oppression. When interpreting the data, readers should consider intersectional experiences beyond singular identities and we encourage future research to further explore intersectionality for L.A. County youth.

We use the following youth subgroups. Readers should consider the lower sample sizes for NHPI, AIAN, SWANA, and immigrant youth [fewer than 150 respondents] when interpreting and applying trends. To avoid erasing experiences and balance the need

for privacy, we include data even for low sample sizes but excludes cases where fewer than five young people responded in a category to protect privacy. We also flag any estimates that may be unreliable for policy purposes.⁸

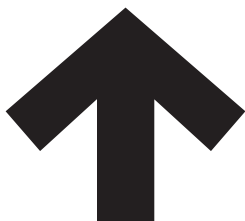
Subgroup	Definition	Sample Size
Racial/Ethnic Identification *		
Latine/x/o/a (Latine)	Latine, including Latine alone or in combination with another race	1,878
Black	Black alone, non-Latine	553
White	White alone, non-Latine	194
Asian	Asian alone, non-Latine	398
Multiracial	Multiracial/Two or more races, non-Latine	103
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHPI)	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, alone or in combination with another race or Latine	40
American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN)	American Indian or Alaska Native, alone or in combination with another race or Latine	124
Southwest Asian or North African (SWANA)	Southwest Asian (Middle Eastern) or North African, alone or in combination with another race or Latine	48
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification		
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and Nonbinary youth	699
Cis Man/Boy	Cisgender Man/Boy, a youth whose gender identity is male and was assigned male sex at birth	1,308
Cis Woman/Girl	Cisgender Woman/Girl, a youth whose gender identity is female and was assigned female sex at birth	1,794
Housing, Immigration, and Criminal Legal System History		
Systems-impacted	Youth who at any point have been in foster care, juvenile hall, probation camp, jail, prison, group home/residential program, or lived with relatives responsible for them legally	459
Unhoused	Youth who in the past year lived in a shelter/emergency housing, transitional housing, motel/hotel, a garage/car/trailer, park/other public space, or temporarily in the home of friends or family	423
Immigrant	Youth in the U.S. under Temporary Protected, Asylum, Refugee, DACA, or Non-Citizenship Status	140

*Categories may overlap based on race and ethnicity definitions used.



ACTION AND RESEARCH DRIVEN BY YOUTH

The BVYTS is by, about, and for BIPOC youth. As such, Bold Vision encourages anyone applying the report's findings to meaningfully engage young people in making sense of the trends and developing solutions. They have a vision for what they want to see and can share the greatest insights into how to get there. Youth helped to define the survey, interpret the findings, and develop recommendations. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers must also engage them to ensure that they have consistent opportunities to define the evidence and solutions.





Findings

Today's youth have grown up during a time of extraordinary change. From a global pandemic to the largest racial justice movement since the Civil Rights Era, young people have navigated a world marked by growing political divisions, systemic racism, police violence, and mass deportations—all during their adolescent and college years. Yet despite these circumstances, many young people continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and hope. Policymakers and practitioners have a unique opportunity to sustain and grow this resilience and hope by learning about and investing in what fosters youth thriving.

We find that many young people in the county have hope for their future and confidence in their abilities. At the same time, the effects of ongoing challenges are visible where a large number of young people report some sign of psychological distress. We find several factors that contribute to youth outcomes in psychological distress and self-efficacy/hope for the future could be starting points for policy change. Caring families and relationships, sparks, and cultural identity each reduce psychological distress and improve self-efficacy and hope for the future. In contrast, microaggressions and structural racism worsen psychological distress. The report describes each of these drivers in depth and details the youth subgroups that could benefit the most from policy interventions in these areas.

The report organizes the findings into five core topics that reflect either outcomes or drivers of youth thriving:

1. Outcome: Strong mental health and minds, including our measure of psychological distress
2. Outcome: Positive identity and hope, including our measure of self-efficacy and hope for the future
3. Driver: Supportive social connections, including our measures of caring families and relationships and opportunities for community involvement
4. Driver: Equity, opportunity, and inclusion, including our measures of microaggressions, structural racism, and cultural identity
5. Driver: Passions and sparks, including our measure of youth sparks

The findings highlight opportunities for policymakers and practitioners to improve youth thriving. Results also show the importance of moving toward a multidimensional, intersectional approach to supporting youth. LGBTQIA+, immigrant, unhoused, and systems-impacted youth often face the greatest challenges. Additionally, Asian, Black, and Multiracial youth report distinct experiences in psychological distress, microaggressions, and cultural identity, respectively. Encouraging youth thriving requires understanding these diverse and intersectional experiences and the supports that are most effective in helping young people reach their fullest potential.

What it looks like when youth are at their best self

Youth Council members responded to the prompt *"Think of a moment where you were at your best self. What was present in your life that helped you feel that way? What wasn't weighing you down that freed you up to feel that way?"* In their responses, they highlighted support, stability, security, and the freedom to explore their passions.

"During a period where I was at my best self, I felt that way because I had the most stability. Stability in my job and housing especially. At this time, I knew where and when my paycheck was coming and with the safety net of school (financial aid, and other scholarships/program) I knew I wouldn't be at a loss most likely for housing."

"At my best moment, I had community organization support, receiving mentorship from adults who looked like me or who loved me for all my identities, stable housing with a stable school leading to deep relationships with friends, family, and teachers."

"What was present in my life was my family and friends. They were supporting me. A hard or supportive environment. I did not have to deal with any big problems like food or money."

"May, June, July 2024 during end of senior year/summer before college. I was very excited and hopeful to start school/college. I was having fun moments with my high school friends for the last time. I had gone on a backpacking trip. I felt confident, excited, and supported with no schoolwork to weigh me down."

"I was probably my best self when I was in elementary school. I was very care free and didn't have to worry about the future or have to make big life-changing decisions. My parents are what made me feel that way."

"My best moment for myself in life was when I was 13 years old. What helped me feel that way were... healthy habits (going to sleep on time); Walking (around my neighborhood); No restrictions (from parents); music."



Strong Mental Health and Minds

Mental health shapes every aspect of a young person's life, from their ability to learn and connect with others, to how they envision their future. Previous research has shown how students with lower levels of psychological distress have better outcomes in education, social connectedness, and physical health.⁹ Despite the importance of positive mental health, youth mental health outcomes have worsened across the nation over the last decade. According to the CDC, in 2011, 28% of high school students reported experiencing depressive symptoms, but in 2023, this number jumped to 40% of high school students.¹⁰

A large contributor to this mental health crisis is the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced young people to become more socially isolated and separated from school support systems. During the pandemic, 29% of U.S. high school students had a parent or caregiver who lost their job, causing financial stress in many families.¹¹ Oftentimes, young people turned to social media to alleviate social isolation and foster connectedness, but research has shown that higher consumption of social media is linked to worsening mental health outcomes, particularly among young girls.¹² In fact, the CDC found that young girls and LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to report experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.¹³ Notably, the U.S. suicide rate for teenage boys aged 15-19 is over twice the rate of teenage girls, pointing to the need to examine multiple indicators of mental health in order to have a comprehensive understanding of youth well-being.¹⁴



Improving youth mental health requires understanding what affects it. Positive mental health is a state of well-being in which individuals can learn and realize their potential, cope with everyday stress, work productively, and contribute to their communities.¹⁵ While there are many ways to assess positive mental well-being, one commonly used indicator is having low levels of psychological distress. To analyze positive mental health, the BGYTS measured psychological distress using the widely used 6-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6).¹⁶ We analyzed the most impactful drivers of psychological distress, charting a roadmap of priorities for policymakers, school boards, funders, and educators. By focusing on the most impactful drivers of youth mental health outcomes, we can align our collective efforts and ensure that our resources create the most change possible.

Measuring Psychological Distress

About how often during the past 30 days did you feel....

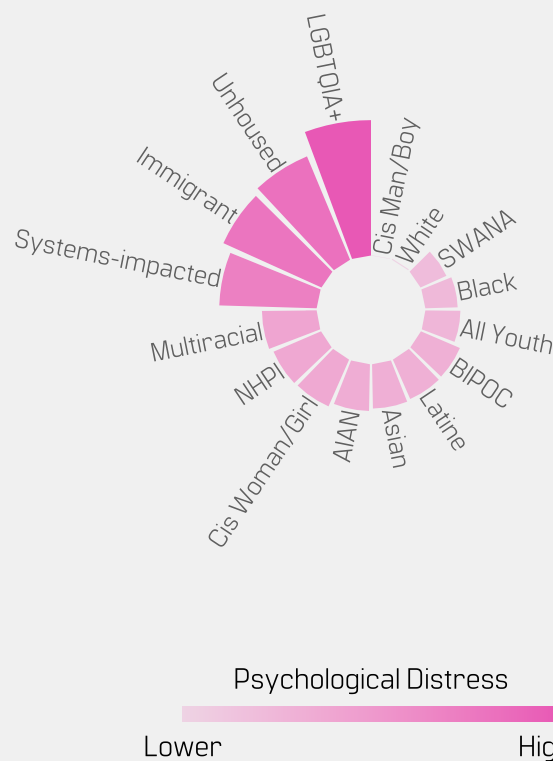
- Nervous
- Hopeless
- Restless or fidgety
- So depressed that nothing could cheer you up
- Feel that everything was an effort
- Worthless

Response options: None of the time, A little of the time, Some of the time, Most of the time, All of the time

Adapted from: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6)¹⁷

Average Expected Psychological Distress

L.A. County youth are not all thriving equally. LGBTQIA+, unhoused, immigrant, and systems-impacted youth experience more psychological distress than other youth.



Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Note: AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.



HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

"Living in a mixed status family, [my] mental health is impacted even though I'm a citizen. What if someone in my family disappears one day?" - Youth Council member



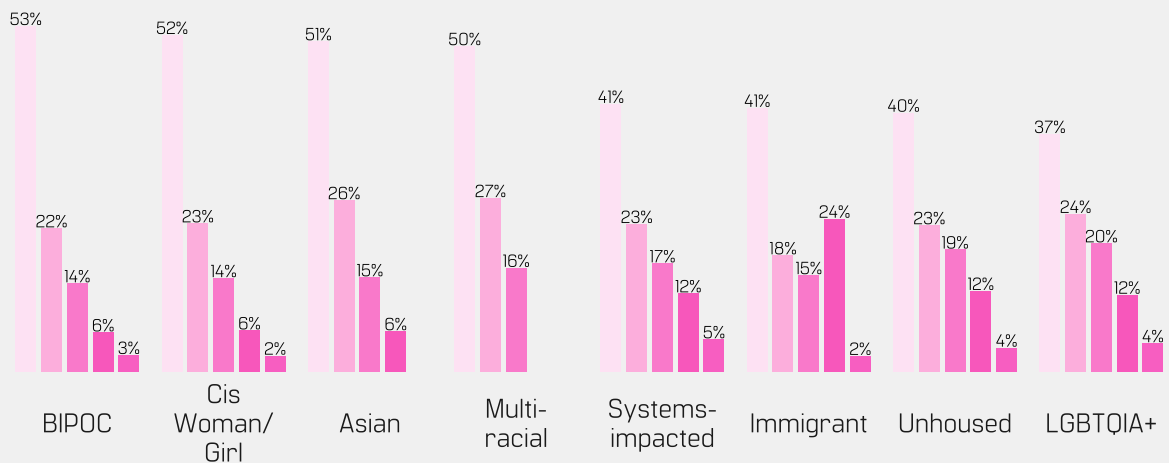
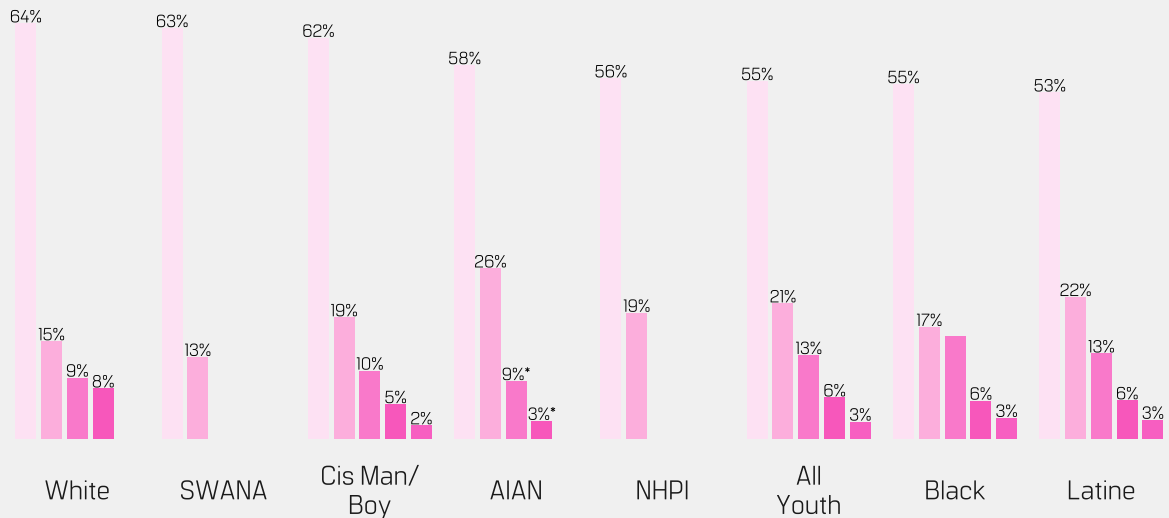
All youth should have freedom from psychological distress so that they can thrive and reach their fullest potential, but this is not happening in the county. **We find that more than two in five young people (42.8%) report feeling worthless at least *a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, or all of the time*.** Some groups face greater levels of psychological distress than others. LGBTQIA+, unhoused, immigrant, and systems-impacted youth are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress compared to youth overall. Many young people of color, such as Latine, NHPI, AIAN, Asian, and Multiracial youth, also report facing greater levels of psychological distress.

Feelings of worthlessness have the strongest role in overall psychological distress. Examining this question within psychological distress, strikingly, over half of systems-impacted (56.6%), immigrant (58.9%), and unhoused young people (57.6%) report feeling worthless at least *a little of the time*. Notably, Youth Council members shared that even if they are not systems-impacted, undocumented, or unhoused, having close family members with these statuses causes young people to worry for their loved ones and experience more psychological distress. These findings underscore the profound impact that direct and indirect experiences of oppression have on youth mental health.

High rates of Multiracial (48.6%) and Asian (48.4%) youth also report feeling worthless at least *a little of the time*. Youth Council members shared how experiencing exclusion and identity ambiguity can affect mental health. One member talked about how "cultural stigma in NHPI and Asian families makes mental health conversations difficult," highlighting how cultural silencing around mental health can deepen isolation. These voices illustrate how cultural stigma and exclusionary racialized experiences can contribute to elevated mental health burdens for certain youth groups. Lower levels of psychological distress among White youth further show the added burden youth of color carry. Disparately, 35.1% of White participants feel worthless at least *a little of the time* compared to 44.4% of BIPOC youth.

All youth should feel valuable, but LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to report feeling worthless than other groups

Survey Question: About how often in the past 30 days, did you feel worthless?



None of the time A little of the time Some of the time Most of the time All of the time

Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

WHAT AFFECTS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

Our analysis shows key contributors to psychological distress that are opportunities for policy interventions. When looking at the impact of the BVYTS components, **we find that as young people's experiences with microaggressions and structural racism increases, their psychological distress levels increase as well. On the other hand, as they experience more caring relationships, sparks, personal safety, and positive cultural identity, their psychological distress levels decrease.** Our models also show that young people who are LGBTQIA+, Asian, or systems-

impacted are more likely to experience increased levels of psychological distress. Additional analysis on cisgender youth show that cisgender women/girls are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress than cisgender men/boys. Addressing young people's experiences with microaggressions, structural racism, caring relationships, sparks, and cultural identity, while simultaneously considering the youth subgroups most at risk, can help policymakers, systems leaders, and advocates work towards reducing psychological distress and supporting positive mental health for all youth in the county.

Psychological Distress Predictors

Ordered from **largest** to **smallest** effect

Effect	Predictor
+	Microaggressions
+	LGBTQIA+ Identity
+	Structural Racism
-	Caring Families and Relationships
-	Sparks
-	Feelings of Personal Safety
+	Asian Racial Identity
-	Cultural Identity
+	Systems Impacted
-	AIAN Racial Identity

+ means a worsening effect, or an increase in psychological distress.
- means a protective effect, or a decrease in psychological distress.
All effects are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level and ordered by absolute value.
For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

Intersectionality, Psychological Distress, and LGBTQIA+ Youth

"A lot of the young folks that we work with are Black or Latino and there is a lot of intersectionality. A lot of our young folks identify as LGBTQ." - Steering Committee member

The Bvyts is one of the first surveys to provide a detailed picture of how LGBTQIA+ youth are doing in the county, which is especially important now given the current political climate. The current federal administration has relentlessly attacked the LGBTQIA+ community, restricting gender-affirming medical care, banning trans people from the military, and allowing federal agencies to discriminate against trans employees.¹⁸ The Bvyts findings all point to LGBTQIA+ youth experiencing the highest levels of psychological distress compared to other demographic groups.

Findings show that LGBTQIA+ young people experience more feelings of worthlessness compared to their cisgender heterosexual peers, even when looking within racial groups. For example, while 43.9% of cisgender heterosexual (cishet) Asian young people report feeling worthless at least *a little of the time*, the number jumps to 65.4% when looking at LGBTQIA+ Asian youth. Note that this is greater than a 20 percentage point difference, which is also the case for Latine and White youth. Notably, there is a smaller difference between cishet Black youth (40.0%) and LGBTQIA+ Black youth (51.5%), pointing to the complexity of race, gender, and sexuality. These trends coincide with other research on differences within the LGBTQIA+ community and the resilience of Black youth against stigma.¹⁹

Considering that unhoused and systems-impacted youth have some of the highest rates of psychological distress, it's important to highlight that there is significant overlap between these groups and being LGBTQIA+. Nationwide research has found that 28% of LGBTQIA+ youth have experienced homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives, with family conflict as a large driver.²⁰ Furthermore, LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the county's foster care system. While 7.2% of L.A. County youth identify as LGBTQ and 2.3% identify as transgender, 13.4% of foster youth identify as LGBTQ and 5.6% identify as transgender.²¹ It is important to consider intersectionality because having multiple marginalized identities likely puts youth at higher risk for experiencing more psychological distress.²²

According to a national survey, LGBTQIA+ youth with access to affirming homes, schools, community events, and online spaces reported lower rates of attempting suicide compared to those who did not. In contrast, anti-LGBTQIA+ policies have tangible, harmful effects on the mental health of queer youth. Nearly two-thirds of LGBTQIA+ young people said that hearing about proposed laws banning discussions of LGBTQIA+ topics in schools significantly worsened their mental health.²³ Studies have also found that LGBTQIA+ youth are more susceptible to psychological distress when lacking supportive relationships in their lives.²⁴ A 2022 study conducted by The Trevor Project revealed that higher resilience in LGBTQ youth is associated with supportive families, schools, and environments.²⁵ To support the well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth, we must create safe and affirming environments *and* advocate for inclusive, anti-discrimination policies, such as teaching queer history in classrooms and building gender-neutral bathrooms.

Positive Identity and Hope



Every young person deserves to feel confident and hopeful about their future. While the need to meet nutritional markers or stable housing may seem more urgent, it is also vital to develop a child's mental resilience. Studies have found that "developing resilience within youth is essential for them to realize their personal potential and reach self-fulfillment."²⁶ These studies have also found that grit can be a higher predictor of success in children than SAT or IQ scores. Our institutions need to build an environment where future generations have hope and believe that they are capable of shaping their own futures. When we invest in the youth of today, we are building a brighter future for everyone tomorrow.

To understand how young people perceive themselves and their future, the BGYTS measured positive identity and hope through three areas: self-efficacy, hope for the future, and freedom to explore self.²⁷ Our analysis finds that self-efficacy and hope for the future measured the same underlying concept. Questions in these two areas asked participants how hopeful they are when they think about their future, if they have a lot to look forward to in their life, if they believe they are capable in most things, and how confident they are that they can deal with unexpected events.



Measuring Self-Efficacy and Hope for the Future

How true is each of these about you?

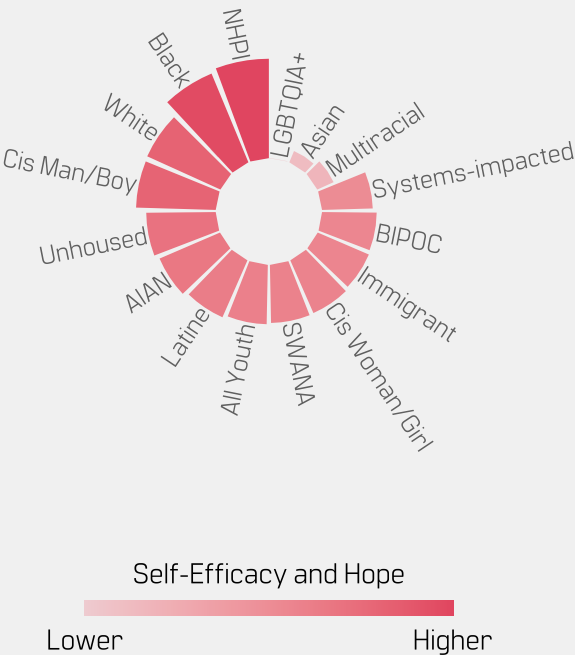
- I feel hopeful when I think about my future.*
- I have a lot to look forward to in my life.*
- I believe that I am capable in most things.**
- I am confident I can deal with unexpected events.**

Response Options: Never true, Sometimes true, Often true, Always true

Adapted from: *The Thriving Orientation Survey (Benson and Scales 2009)²⁸ and **Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (Diener, Su, and Tay 2014)²⁹

Average Expected Self-Efficacy and Hope

All youth should feel hopeful and confident. LGBTQIA+, Asian, and Multiracial youth on average feel less confidence and hope for their future compared to other youth.



Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Note: AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

"I'm beyond grateful to have an opportunity to advance my community. Being around like-minded youth brings me joy and gives me hope for my future."
- Youth Council member

Youth in the county have varying levels of hope for the future and self-efficacy. Many have high hopes and confidence, but a consistent share of them could feel more hopeful and confident. **While 72% of youth often or always feel hopeful about their future, more than one in four young people (26.7%) never or only sometimes feel hopeful.** Similarly, 75.1% of young people often or always believe they are capable of most things, but almost one in four (23.6%) young people never or only sometimes believe in their capabilities. A positive identity and hopeful outlook is crucial for a young person to strive through the challenges in life and pursue their passions.

Often, youth that experience inequity and oppression are less likely to feel confident or hopeful. The survey finds that LGBTQIA+, Asian, and Multiracial youth have the lowest expected rates of self-efficacy and hope for the future. Black, White, and cisgender young men/boys have some of the highest expected rates. While NHPI youth have the highest expected rates, this is based on a small sample. Systems-impacted, BIPOC, immigrant, cisgender women/girls, and SWANA young people also report rates below the average of all youth. Unfortunately, many of these young people are already known to face discrimination and hardships simply because of their identities. All youth should have a sense of confidence and hope for their future, but this isn't happening in the county.

For example, Asian young people are least likely to report *always* feeling hopeful about their future at a rate of 22.1% and LGBTQIA+ young people report this was *always* true at a rate of 25.9%. In other words, about three in four Asian and LGBTQIA+ youth do not always feel hopeful about their future. Black and NHPI youth have some of the best rates when it comes to measuring self-efficacy and hope. About 44% of Black and 43.8% of NHPI youth say they *always* feel hopeful about their future. Existing research found that Black youth often have protective factors and coping strategies that help develop resiliency, but this is no reason to overlook historical and current structural inequities that Black communities face.³⁰ When people are in high-stress environments, sometimes resiliency is a survival mechanism, which can be positively interpreted as grit and a factor of success. The same resiliency can also mask the systemic racism harming and holding BIPOC youth back. For example, the Bold Vision Mid-Term Report found that NHPI and Black youth were most affected by criminal justice systems and faced some of the highest disparities in positive youth development indicators.³¹

Furthermore, ignoring the high demands placed on them by society, especially amidst systemic oppression, can manifest as stress stored in the body and may worsen health outcomes for Black communities in general. Research has further shown how the impacts are worse for young Black girls.³² We must also consider the role of intersectionality when interpreting these rates. Trends may differ among Black and NHPI youth based on other identities they share, like LGBTQIA+, immigrant, or young cisgender woman/girl. In this survey, the sample size of NHPI youth is smaller than the other groups, so there is less data reliability. We encourage further research into the county's NHPI youth to corroborate the BVTYS findings.



All youth should feel hopeful about their future, but Asian and LGBTQIA+ youth are least likely to feel hopeful all the time

Survey Question: I feel hopeful when I think about my future



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

WHAT AFFECTS SELF-EFFICACY AND HOPE

To understand the drivers of self-efficacy and hope, we analyzed how the different BGYTS components and demographics affect youth outcomes. **We find that the components that most positively contribute to self-efficacy and hope are caring families and relationships, followed by sparks and cultural**

identity. Whether young people have opportunities for community involvement also has a moderate impact on self-efficacy and hope. Accounting for how youth fared in these components and other characteristics, we find that Asian and LGBTQIA+ youth on average have lower rates of self-efficacy and hope—indicating the urgency to deepen our understanding of their needs and experiences.

Self-Efficacy and Hope for the Future Predictors

Ordered from largest to smallest effect

Effect	Predictor
+	Caring Families and Relationships
+	Sparks
+	Cultural Identity
-	Asian Racial Identity
-	LGBTQIA+ Identity
+	Unhoused
+	Opportunities for Community Involvement
+	Feelings of Personal Safety

+ means a protective effect, or an increase in self-efficacy and hope.
- means a worsening effect, or a decrease in self-efficacy and hope.
All effects are statistically significant at the p<0.05 level and ordered by absolute value.
For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.



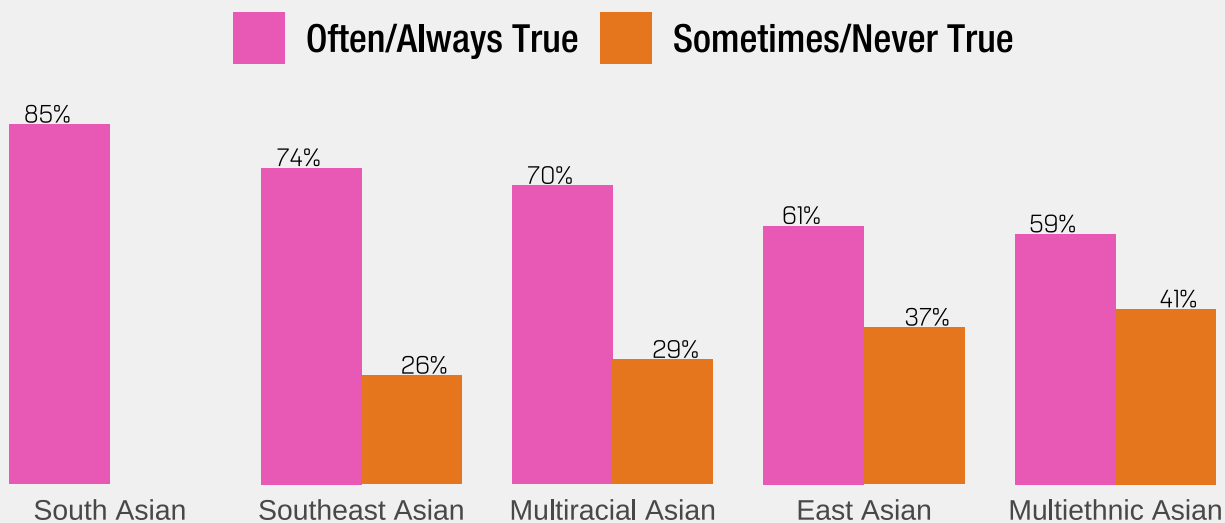
Differences in Hope Among Asian Youth

Asian American communities emerge from over twenty different countries of origin. The broader umbrella term 'Asian' includes a diversity of communities with differing experiences. Researchers have found that within the larger Asian category, communities have a wide range of immigration journeys, as well as economic, social, and educational outcomes.³³ If we want to demystify stereotypes that hold back Asian youth, like the model minority myth, we must understand how needs and outcomes vary by Asian subgroups.

The BGYTS reveals that while the aggregated data analysis shows Asian youth are least likely to report feeling hopeful about their future, the disaggregated Asian subgroups have varied outcomes. East Asian young people are one of the Asian subgroups least likely to report feeling hopeful about the future *often or always* (60.8%). Southeast Asian young people have better rates on this scale (74.4%) and South Asian young people are most likely to feel hopeful about their future (84.6%) compared to others in the Asian community.

Multiethnic and East Asian youth are least likely to feel hopeful about their future among all Asian youth

Survey Question: I feel hopeful about my future



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

One of the explanations for this trend is that the most populous group within the South Asian communities are Indian families who have the highest median household income compared to other Asian subgroup households.³⁴ Economic stability, especially in a county with some of the highest housing costs, impacts a child's psychological framework and outlook on their future. While some Asian communities may have better economic outcomes, others do not and this has a ripple effect for youth thriving.

Disaggregated data from the COVID-19 pandemic also illustrated these subgroup differences where Filipino Americans comprised the largest shares of Asian American deaths in California. The pandemic marks a pivotal moment for current generations in terms of the increase in anti-Asian hate. Asian communities faced increasing discrimination and stress because of discriminatory stereotypes directed at them during and after the pandemic.³⁵

A 2021 survey from the Pew Research Center found that "of English-speaking Asian adults..., one-third said they feared someone might threaten or physically attack them."³⁶

When adults face discrimination, it can be an incredibly distressing experience, and it can be even more harmful for young people as they are still developing confidence and a sense of self in the world. While the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, the effects have seeped into the social experiences of Asian youth. Policymakers need to pay attention to how our programs invite Asian youth and their families to access mental health and other resources. Asian communities are ethnically rich, nuanced, and diverse—the BVYTS data is a step toward understanding and addressing the unique needs of this community.



Supportive Social Connections

Social environment is also known to promote thriving. Positive social connections, loyal relationships, and strong community ties are all social environmental factors that greatly contribute to how a young person perceives their own self and their community's collective future. Studies have continued to find that supportive adult relationships and connections with community matter for youth thriving, and all young people should have people they can turn to and rely on.³⁷

As youth develop interpersonal relationships and experience deep connections in the early stages of life, social environment influences whether they continue to expand their networks with trust and confidence or with fear of rejection and hopelessness in the future. The social experiences youth have now affect whether they will ask for help when they need it as an adult. Policymakers have the opportunity to create a community for young people that invests in our collective futures by investing in young people's families and social connections. When adults in a community are resourced, they have the tools and mental capacity to provide the additional support that a growing, developing youth needs in their early years.

Social connections for youth can take many forms. It can look like parental or caretaker bonds, mentorship from coaches or teachers, opportunities to create community ties, and peer friendships. To understand the strength of these relationships, the BVYTS asked young people questions on how supportive their relationships are and if they have opportunities for

community involvement. We group the BVYTS caring families and relationships component with our measure for opportunities for community involvement because the latter contributes to the first and overall provides a space for supportive social connections in a young person's life.

CARING FAMILIES & RELATIONSHIPS

"Having someone, something, or a community to rely on creates stability and a sense of safety where even if things go wrong or are not the greatest, I still know I'll have someone or people who are my champions and are in my corner that I'll have people to get through it with."
- Youth Council member

When youth have people to turn to and rely on in good and bad times, they experience the love and support essential to positive mental health and hope for the future. To measure caring families and relationships in a young person's life, we asked questions about the quality of their social connections. The survey purposely asked broad questions to be inclusive of non-traditional relationships like spiritual counselors, neighbors, etc. The objective was to provide insight into how meaningful the social connections and relationships are in the lives of the youth surveyed.

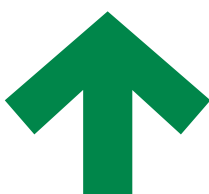
Measuring Caring Families & Relationships

How true are each of these about you?

- When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me.*
- When something good happens to me, I have people who I like to share the good news with.*
- In my community, there is an adult who really cares about me.**
- At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who really cares about me.**³⁸

Response Options: Never true, Sometimes true, Often true, Always true

Adapted from: *The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-Being (Kern et al. 2016)³⁹ and **California Healthy Kids Survey (2016)⁴⁰



Caring families and relationships have the greatest impact on self-efficacy and hope for youth out of all factors measured in the survey, and it is associated with reduced reported psychological distress. Whether it's emotional support, mentorship, or guidance, every thriving adult has had someone support their ambitions in their early years. L.A. County leaders need to pay more attention to what investments

are needed to enhance caring relationships in a young person's life. Research in "A Community Partnered Approach for Defining Child and Youth Thriving," a 2021 study from the University of Pittsburgh, found that one of the foundational contributions to a young person's overall mental well-being is the quality of relationships in their lives.⁴¹

When youth have someone who will be there for them, they have more hope for the future



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

The Bvyts finds that almost one in two young people (47.5%) who say they *always* have someone who will be there for them also report *always* feeling hopeful about their future. Conversely, young people who report that they *never* have someone there for them are more than 10 times more likely to say they also *never* feel hopeful about their future (20.9%) compared to those who *always* have support (2%). Overall, the

analysis finds that decision-makers need to pay attention to resourcing and uplifting the social environments that support youth alongside investing in the physical environments they live and grow in.

"[Having someone to rely on] makes me feel like I can make it through anything."
- Youth Council member

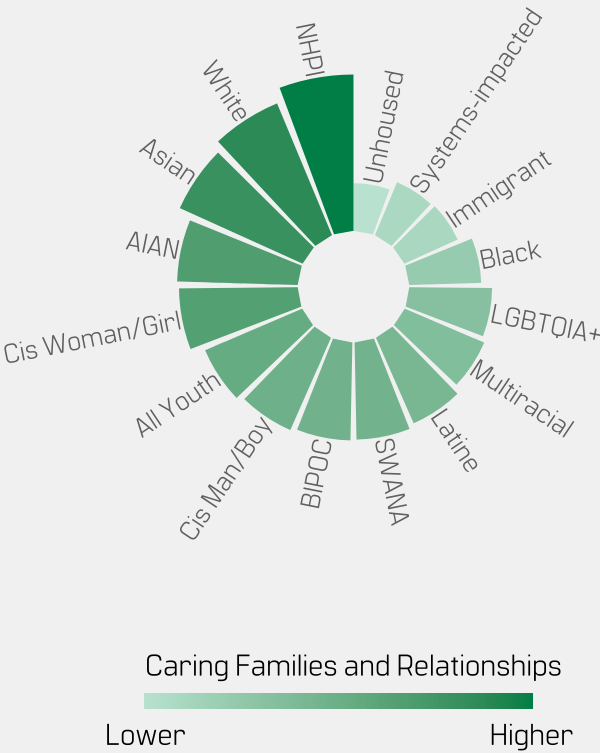
HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

All youth should have someone to turn to and rely on, but in L.A. County, this isn't the case because institutions and decision-makers have not equitably supported families and communities of all identities. For adults and

peers to provide the emotional support and guidance youth need in their relationships, they too need to be supported. For example, some Youth Council members talked about how it is hard for youth in low-income families to feel that they can reach out for help when those around them are in need of help themselves.

Average Expected Caring Families and Relationships

All youth should have support from their families and other adults in their lives. Unhoused systems-impacted, and immigrant youth are least likely to have these caring relationships.



Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Note: AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

On average, unhoused, systems-impacted, immigrant, and Black youth are least likely to have caring relationships compared to other youth. Many of these communities are already targets of systemic oppression. When communities are overtaxed and barely covering their essentials, their ability to support the young people in their lives may be compromised. Conversely, White and Asian youth on average have higher expected levels of caring relationships. And while NHPI youth had the highest average, their rates are based on a small sample.

Whether or not young people have someone to go to when they have a problem has the strongest influence on their overall level of caring families and relationships. Like the overall expected levels, immigrant, systems-impacted, and unhoused youth alongside Multiracial and SWANA youth are least likely to feel they have someone there for them when they have a problem. Fewer than one in three immigrant young people (32.5%) feel they *always* have someone there for them when they have a problem. Immigrant youth, and the social networks they rely on, are too burdened by systemic oppression and uncertainty. Comparatively, over one in two White young people (52.9%) say this is *always* true.

Nearly one in two Asian young people (48.1%) also say they *always* have someone there for them when they have a problem, but on average Asian youth have lower levels of self-efficacy and hope. Caring relationships, and their meaning, can vary within racial

groups. East Asian young people are most likely to report they have someone to go to when they have a problem compared to other Asian youth. About 83.6% of all Asian young people say this was *always* or *often* true compared to 86% of East Asian youth. Southeast Asian and South Asian youth report lower rates at 81.1% and 85.1%, followed by Asian youth with multiple Asian identities (78.9%) and Asian youth with multiracial identities (77.1%). Youth Council members, some of whom identify as Asian, shared how family support can be a double-edged sword—a source of support and stress. At times caring adults can show up as added pressure to succeed at high standards. One understanding is that Asian households may interpret support from a basic necessities viewpoint rather than from a social/psychological lens.⁴² For example, when Asian young people report having someone to go to with a problem, maybe they are thinking of a problem with a homework assignment but not social emotional issues that can be just as troublesome.

The BGYTS data helps to start a conversation on what social connections mean for youth in the county. Decision-makers must consider what relationships youth need alongside them, e.g., mentors, parents, peers, adults at school. Those relationships must also have support in showing up for youth whether that be support in meeting their own basic needs or connecting with the social emotional needs of their young people.

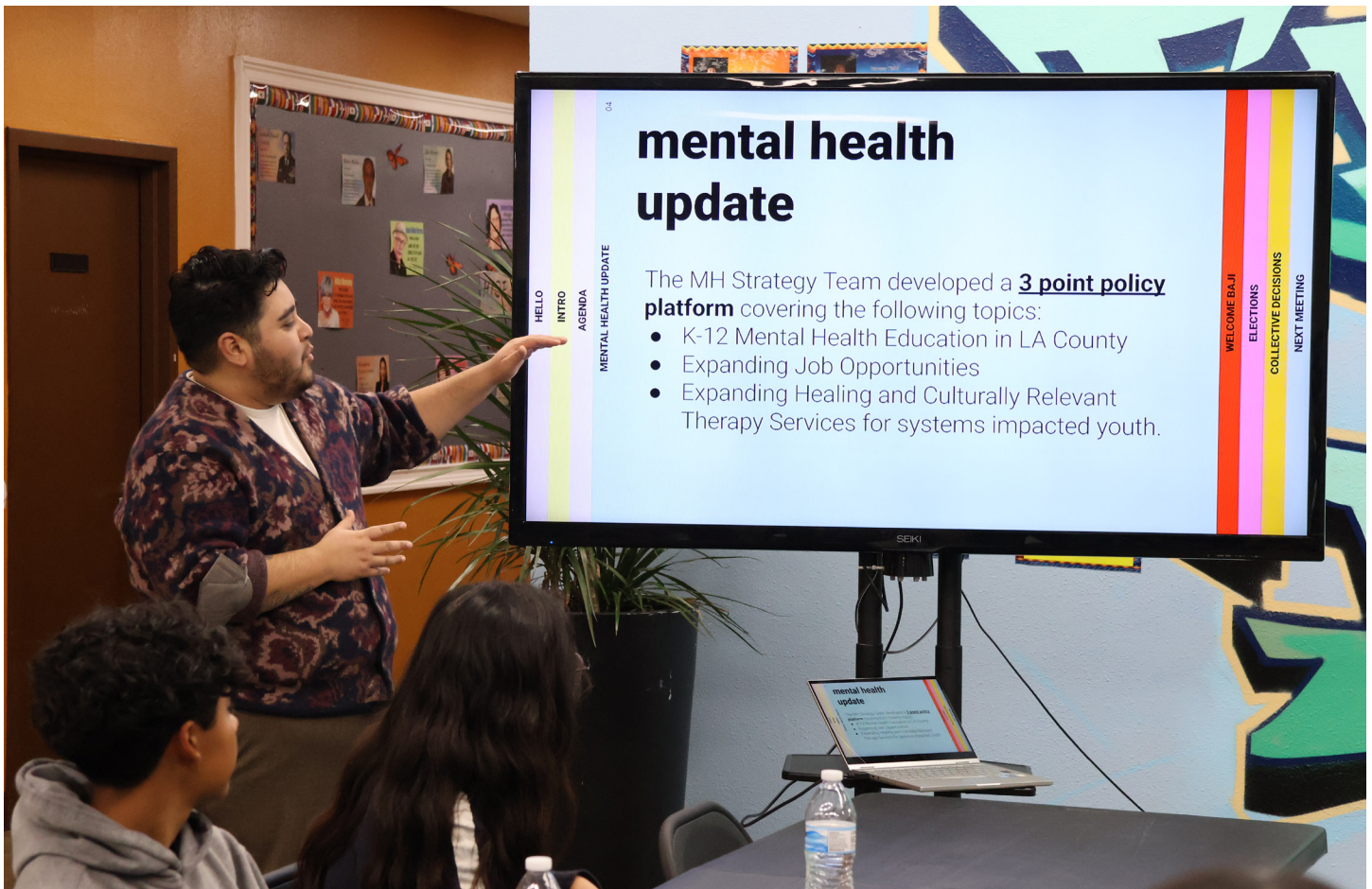


Caring individuals youth can rely on are essential to youth well-being, but fewer immigrant, SWANA, and Multiracial youth feel they always have someone to go to with a problem

Survey Question: When I have a problem, I have someone who will be there for me



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

"When I get involved in my community, it makes me feel like all the big dreams I have to save the world can come true. I know the power I possess, and I'd do ANYTHING to make sure other kids and adults don't have to struggle the way I did. It gives me a vision, a call to action, a dream, a potential reality, and something I can work towards, and no one can stop me but ME!" -Youth Council member

L.A. County is rich with a plethora of great CBOs representing a diverse array of communities. The Youth Council during both sensemaking sessions talked about the importance of community involvement in their lives. Opportunities for community involvement provide important avenues for youth to build relationships, identify and develop their passions, and find ways to contribute to their communities.

Measuring Opportunities for Community Involvement

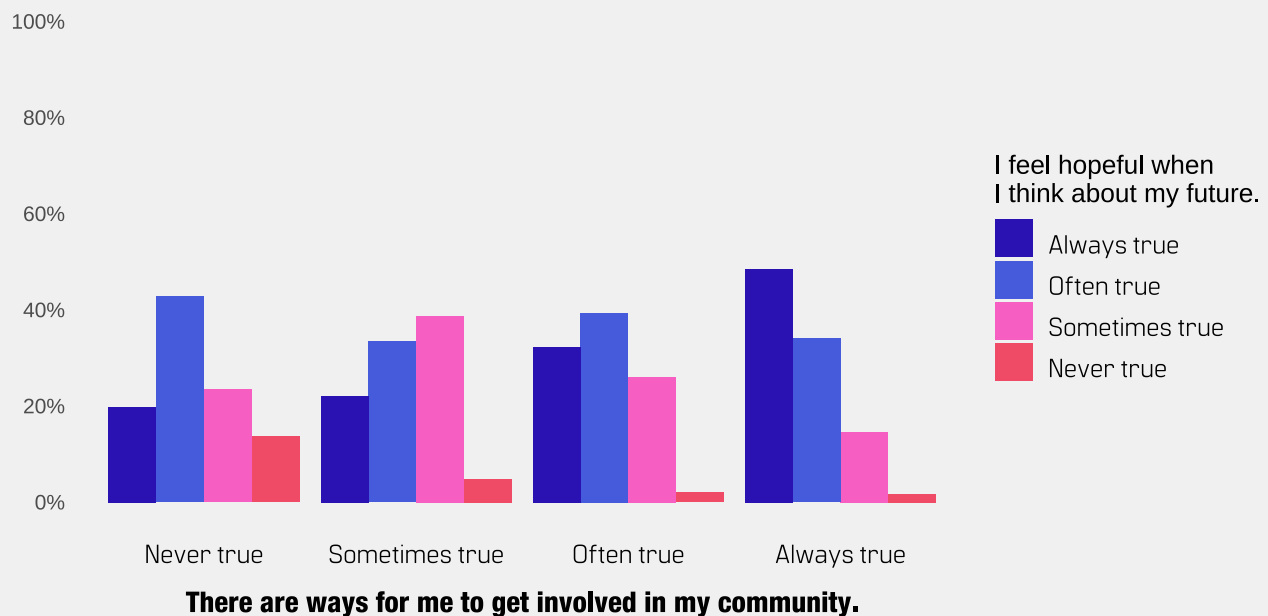
How true are each of these about you?

- There are ways for me to get involved in my community.

Response Options: Never true, Sometimes true, Often true, Always true

Adapted from: Youth Civic and Character Measures Toolkit [Search Institute]⁴³

When youth have opportunities for community involvement, they have more hope for the future



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

The more young people feel they have ways to get involved in their community, the more likely they are to also feel hopeful about their future. **The young people who report they *never* have ways to get involved with their community are about eight times more likely to also say they *never* feel hopeful about their future (13.7%) compared to those 1.7% of young people who *always* have community opportunities.** Almost half of

youth (48.4%) who say they *always* have opportunities for community involvement also feel they are *always* hopeful about their future. For example, Youth Council members described how being in spaces with like-minded people who care about you, support you, and want to make real change can make you feel hopeful about your own future.



HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

"Opportunities to get involved in my community make me more confident about actually making change for the future. Being able to be a part of spaces where the change actually happens shows me how much work it requires, and I just hope that people maintain the drive to get it done."

-Youth Council member

More infrastructure is needed to ensure all youth have access to these opportunities. In the Bold Vision Mid-Term report, the authors found that base-building and social advocacy organizations had an average tenure of 23 years with an average \$2.5 million dollar budget showing the strong foundation for community involvement in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ The data in the report also

showed that not every region or youth had the same access to these opportunities. Youth in the Antelope Valley region were the least likely to have access to community involvement opportunities. Black youth had the greatest access to base-building organizations in the county while NHPI, Multiracial, and Asian youth had the lowest access.⁴⁵

Based on the BVYTS, we also find differences in opportunities for other youth groups. Immigrant, unhoused, and systems-impacted young people are least likely to say they *always* have opportunities to get involved in their community. Only about one in four (24%) of immigrant youth *always* say this was true. Organizations providing opportunities for community involvement can consider barriers to access for these groups. If policymakers and leaders would capitalize on the crucial work of CBOs by providing them with the financial and structural investments they need, we could see all youth find a place for them to thrive.

Community involvement matters to youth confidence and hope, but immigrant, unhoused, and systems-impacted youth are least likely to have opportunities to engage with their community

Survey Question: There are ways for me to get involved in my community



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

Opportunities for Community Involvement, Hope, & Immigrant Youth

Under the current federal administration, immigrant youth and families are under attack. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in L.A. County are tearing families apart and profiling people based on their location and appearance. The fear, uncertainty, and trauma from these actions will have long-term effects on immigrants and our county at-large. Immigration is the foundation of this country. Over the centuries, immigrants have brought their hopes, dreams, skills, and resources to our communities. The BVTYS finds immigrant youth have high levels of resilience and hope. Investing in opportunities to further support their strength is of utmost importance now given the current context.

Immigrant youth have high hopes for their future and self-efficacy. Increasing their opportunities for community involvement is one avenue for supporting them to thrive even more. Immigrant youth who have more opportunities for community involvement also have higher levels of hope for their future. About 81.1% of immigrant young people who *often* or *always* have opportunities for community involvement also feel hopeful about their futures *often* or *always*, compared to 65.5% of immigrant youth who have fewer opportunities for community involvement. Research has shown that youth who frequently exhibit prosocial behaviors – benefiting others – have a cluster of positive development and well-being characteristics, including good self-regulation; relatively high levels of self-esteem, empathy, and sympathy; trustworthiness; peer acceptance and likability.⁴⁶

However, immigrant youth have the lowest levels of opportunities for community involvement compared to other youth. About 65.2% of immigrant youth *often* or *always* have opportunities for community involvement, meaning over one in three (34.2%) *never* or only *sometimes* have opportunities. Importantly, immigrant youth often identify with other demographic groups that are lower in opportunities as well.

- 44% are unhoused compared to 10.2% of non-immigrant youth
- 45.7% are systems-impacted compared to 11.3% of non-immigrant youth

Each of these systems and statuses could raise barriers to community involvement. Immigrant youth who are unhoused may struggle to be consistently connected to a community organization or may need to prioritize finding housing while also navigating their documentation status. Additional obstacles stem from language barriers, family financial obligations, the fear of deportation, or cultural differences. In some cultures, youth may be expected to focus on academics or family responsibilities instead of civic participation and community engagement. Youth Council members also suggested that immigrant youth may be hesitant to get involved with community organizations because they may fear repercussions related to their documentation status. Policymakers and CBOs should consider how they address these barriers to participation (e.g., outreach, transportation, stipends) and how they vary as a function of intersectional identities.



Now, more than ever, as immigrant communities are under attack, other communities must come together to ensure their safety and support the advancement of immigrant youth, a diverse group in L.A. County that crosses race and other identities. Based on BGYTS data, 50.8% of immigrant youth identify as Latine, 28.2% as White, 9.7% as Black, and 4.9% as Asian. Youth-led racial justice coalitions within the county are amongst CBOs leading the efforts to promote multiracial

solidarity in protecting immigrant communities. These youth groups along with immigrant rights organizations, faith-based, and other community organizations have united to help establish rapid response networks in order to support immigrant youth impacted by the ongoing ICE abductions. Policymakers and community leaders likewise have a responsibility to protect the future of immigrant youth because they are part of our collective future.



Equity, Opportunity, & Inclusion

When the individuals, institutions, and systems around youth support and respect their identities, youth have greater positive outcomes. But too often, interpersonal and structural racism cause environmental stressors and trauma that negatively affect youth and diminish the resources that help them thrive.⁴⁷

Startling racial and geographic disparities persist in the county. The criminal legal system is most likely to arrest Black youth and bring them into the foster care and probation systems.⁴⁸ Areas with higher pollution and less green space have higher numbers of BIPOC youth. Meanwhile, Latine, Asian, and Multiracial youth have less access to healthcare services when they need it. Understanding how these structural inequities affect youth well-being is even more important given federal attacks on any efforts to include and support immigrants, people of color, transgender individuals, and other vulnerable communities.

The Bvyts uniquely measured how youth experience racism and inclusion in their environments. It included measures on microaggressions, institutional racism, and structural racism. We also include cultural identity under equity, opportunity, and inclusion given its relationships to the other areas. Cultural identity and pride is proven to moderate the effects of microaggressions and structural racism.⁴⁹ The Bvyts mostly focused on discrimination related to racial identity, but young people may also experience discrimination based on gender, sexuality, immigration status, class, and other characteristics. These forms

of oppression must also be considered when designing programs and investments. The Bvyts provides policymakers, decision-makers, and practitioners with a starting point for fostering fair, inclusive environments for all youth identities.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

"Microaggressions put a lot of pressure on me to 'defy the odds' and that can lead to a lot of anxiety about school, my home life, etc." - Youth Council member

Microaggressions are a form of interpersonal racism that often happens in individual interactions through subtle insults, comments, or even compliments. They may be intentional or unintentional, but they communicate derogatory perceptions about a person's race, gender, immigration status, or other identities based on individual and deeply rooted systemic bias.⁵⁰ These everyday acts of racism lead to negative effects on youth depression, anxiety, self-esteem, substance use, physical health, and academic performance.⁵¹ They manifest in all settings from schools or health clinics to private businesses. Over time, their impact accumulates in young people and taxes their resilience.

Microaggressions do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they are connected to structural inequities, power, and privilege. Institutional and structural inequities validate beliefs underlying racial bias and stereotypes. For instance, unequal access to quality schools

due to segregation underlies microaggressions on college campuses where students or faculty question Black students' intelligence.⁵² These interactions and assumptions are inaccurate and harmful to youth thriving. In college campus settings, they have caused students to change majors, drop classes, or even leave college.⁵³

"[Microaggressions] make me feel awkward and question the safety of my environment. It can be hurtful and make me feel unwelcomed in certain spaces."
- Youth Council member

The B-VYTS measured microaggressions by asking youth about four racially driven interactions or comments they may have experienced in the past 12 months. They most frequently report being told hurtful or offensive jokes/comments about their race. Nearly one in three young people (30.8%) experience this microaggression at least some of the time. As youth experience this microaggression more often, their level of psychological distress increases.

Measuring Microaggressions

During the past 12 months, how often have you dealt with any of the following due to your race?

- Being asked to show proof that you were American
- Being treated like you are dumb or stupid
- Being told hurtful or offensive jokes/comments about your race
- Being told that you are a "good example of your race"

Response Options: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Most of the time, All of the time, Does not apply to me

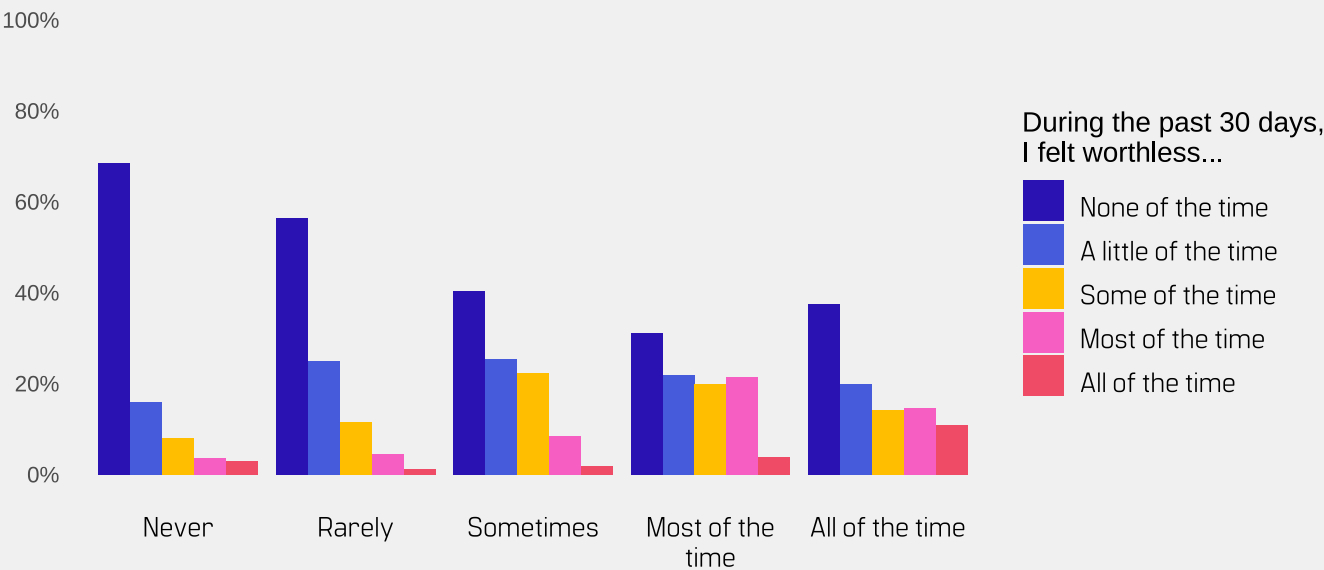
Developed by: The LMU Psychology Applied Research Center



Feelings of worthlessness nearly double among young people who are told hurtful or offensive jokes about their race *all of the time*, compared to youth who *never* experience these microaggressions. **About 59.5% of young people who *always* experience these microaggressions felt worthless at least *a little of the time* compared to 30.6% of those who were *never* told hurtful or offensive jokes about their**

race. Microaggressions negatively affect psychological distress across racial identities, sexual orientations, and genders. Even when accounting for caring relationships, cultural identity, experiences of structural racism, sparks, and personal safety, microaggressions contribute to higher levels of psychological distress. Moreover, **microaggressions have the largest effect on psychological distress out of all the factors studied.**

When youth are told hurtful comments about their race, they are more likely to feel worthless



During the past 12 months, I dealt with being told hurtful or offensive jokes/comments about my race.

Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

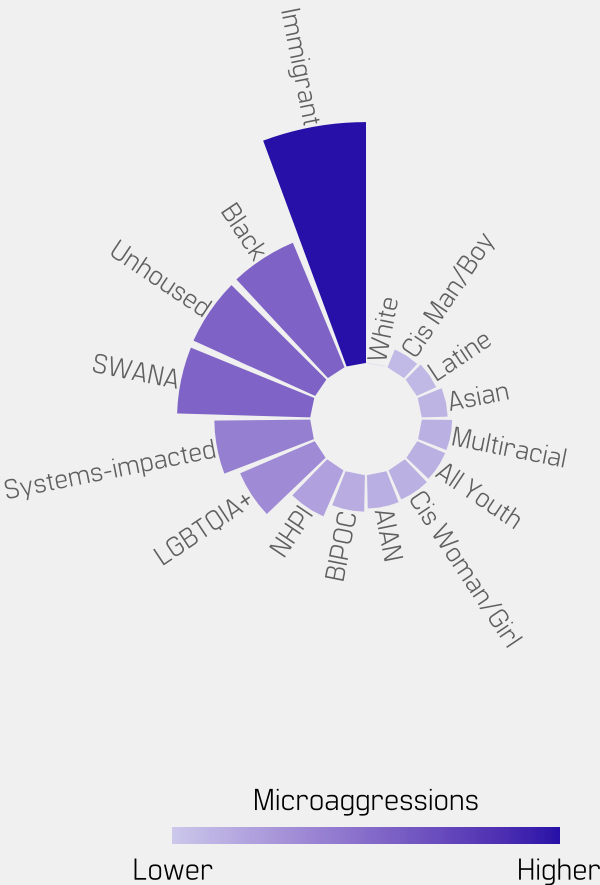
HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

Some young people are far more likely to be subjected to these microaggressions. Immigrant, Black, unhoused, SWANA, systems-impacted, and LGBTQIA+ youth are on average most likely to experience

microaggressions, while White youth on average are least likely to experience them. Cisgender women/girls experience microaggressions more often than cisgender men/boys, while LGBTQIA+ youth are most likely to experience microaggressions compared to their cisgender heterosexual counterparts.

Average Expected Microaggressions

L.A. County youth vary in how likely they are to experience micoaggressions. Immigrant, Black, unhoused, and SWANA youth are most likely to be subject to microaggressions.



Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Note: AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.



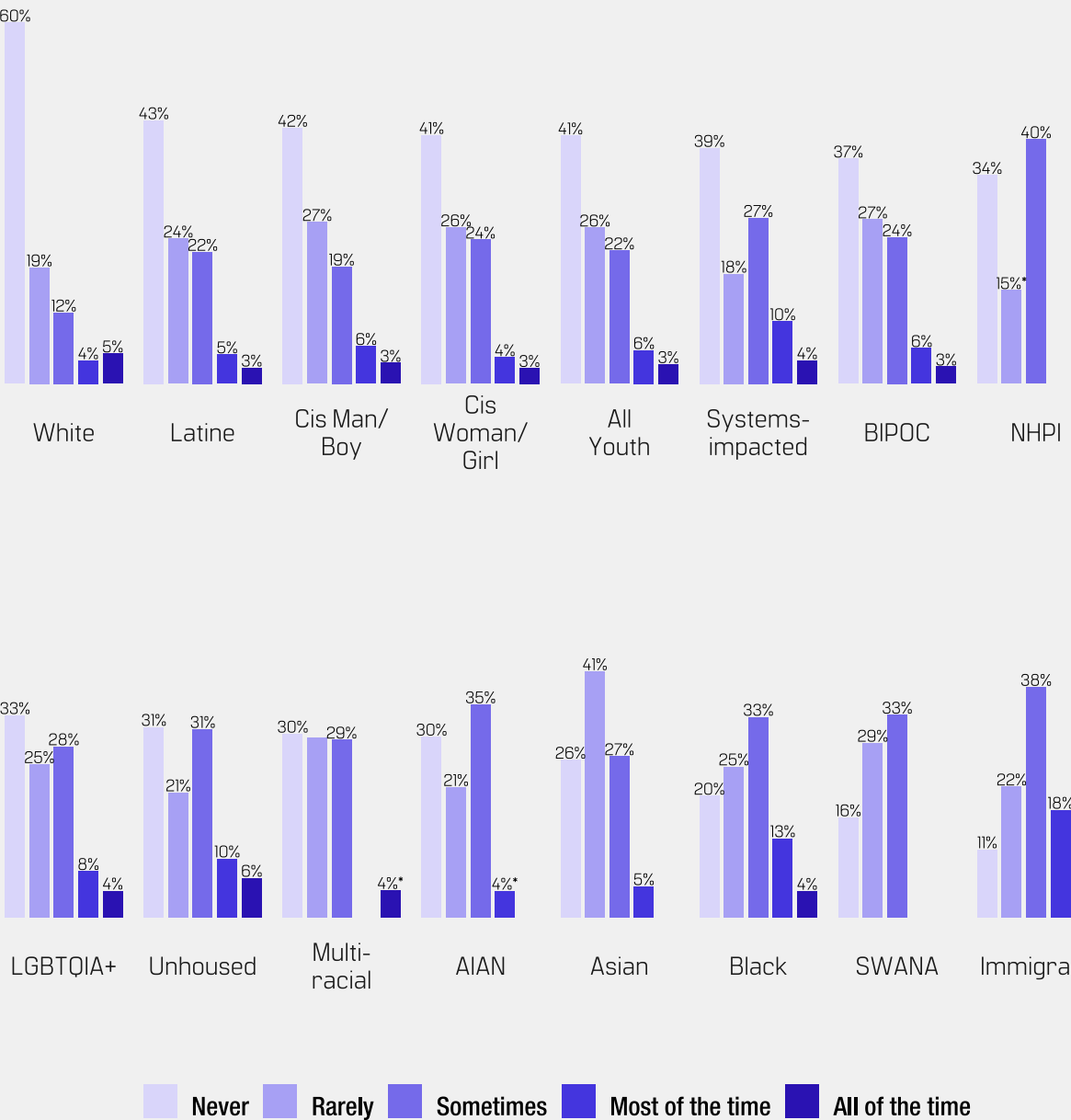
Looking at how often youth experience specific microaggressions can underscore differences even more. As an example, nearly four in five (78.8%) White young people *never* or *rarely* report hearing hurtful jokes or comments about their race compared to less than a third of immigrant youth (32.8%) and less than half of SWANA (45.2%) and Black youth (44.9%). Youth Council members described how collectively these microaggressions impact their confidence, sense of belonging, and security. Over time, the negative emotions they feel from microaggressions add up, intensify, and wear down on their mental health.

"Microaggressions to me are hurtful because it causes me to be self-conscious or overthink. Over time microaggressions built up cause me to realize the bigger picture that things like these are not normal or okay." - Youth Council member

Youth in the county are remarkably resilient and adapt to these assaults. The BVYTS data suggest Black and immigrant youth maintain high levels of sparks and hope for their future. Strong self-worth, cultural identity, beliefs in equality, and supportive interpersonal relationships help moderate the effects of microaggressions and racism.⁵⁴ However, youth should not have to rely on their resilience alone. Policymakers, practitioners, and any individuals working with youth are responsible for fostering positive environments that affirm their dignity.

No young person should experience distressing or racialized interactions based on their race, yet immigrant, SWANA, and Black youth are most likely to be subject to these interactions

Survey Question: In the past 12 months, how often have you dealt with being told hurtful or offensive jokes/comments about your race?



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.



STRUCTURAL RACISM

"Experiencing structural racism affects my mental health by bringing out my insecurities and making me question whether or not I am good enough." - Youth Council member

Structural racism is the way in which mutually reinforcing systems foster racial inequities through their governance, public policies, and institutional practices.⁵⁵ These in turn, reinforce racist ideologies and maintain the status quo in the distribution of education, housing, employment, wealth, and health. In 2020, the American Public Health Association declared structural racism a public health crisis, pervasive across environments and institutions responsible for distributing care and resources.⁵⁶

From the time the U.S. founders and property owners forcibly enslaved Black Americans and removed American Indian/Alaska Native children from their communities, to the 20th and 21st centuries where policymakers imprisoned Japanese Americans, enforced harsh laws to prevent the immigration of Latine people, and supported segregation laws to ensure White communities maintained their wealth, our national structures and institutions have designed environments to ensure inequities in resources, wealth, and power.⁵⁷ These inequities, in turn, influence outcomes in physical

health and psychological well-being.⁵⁸ When decision-makers address structural inequities, the health of our nation benefits. Structural racism is linked to youth stress, anxiety, depression, delinquency, social isolation, and conduct issues.⁵⁹ Understanding and addressing structural racism can lead to positive youth outcomes that will yield benefits for society in the future.

"Structural racism impacts my mental health because the U.S. government system is made to have Black people fail. When I look over my life, my family has been so impacted by systems of oppression. To achieve anything I have to be twice as good." - Youth Council member

BVYTS included seven questions to understand how youth are affected by structural racism in housing, health, employment, education, the built environment, and the criminal legal systems. According to the findings, not having enough affordable housing and quality health care services are the structural inequities that most affect youth. **Nearly half (49.6%) report that not having enough affordable housing gets in the way of living their best life at least *sometimes* and over one in three (39.6%) say that poor-quality health services get in the way of living their best life at least *sometimes*.**

Measuring Structural Racism

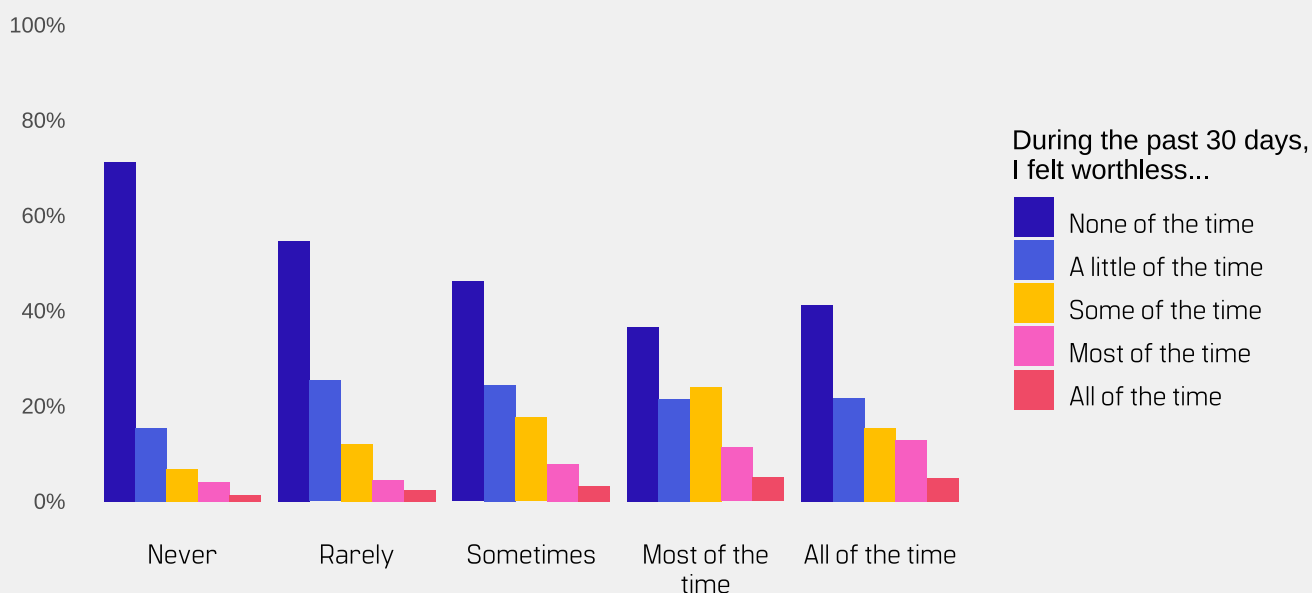
How often do each of these get in the way of you living your best life?

- Not enough housing I or my family can afford
- Poor quality health services
- Not enough money to live off
- Poor quality schools
- Not enough career/job opportunities
- Too much pollution or poisons in the air or water in my neighborhood
- Contact with the police

Response Options: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Most of the time, All of the time, Does not apply to me

Adapted from: The Kaiser Family Foundation
Undeclared Survey on Race and Health by the LMU
Psychology Applied Research Center⁶⁰

When youth lack access to quality health services, they are more likely to feel worthless



Poor quality health services get in the way of me living my best life.

Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.



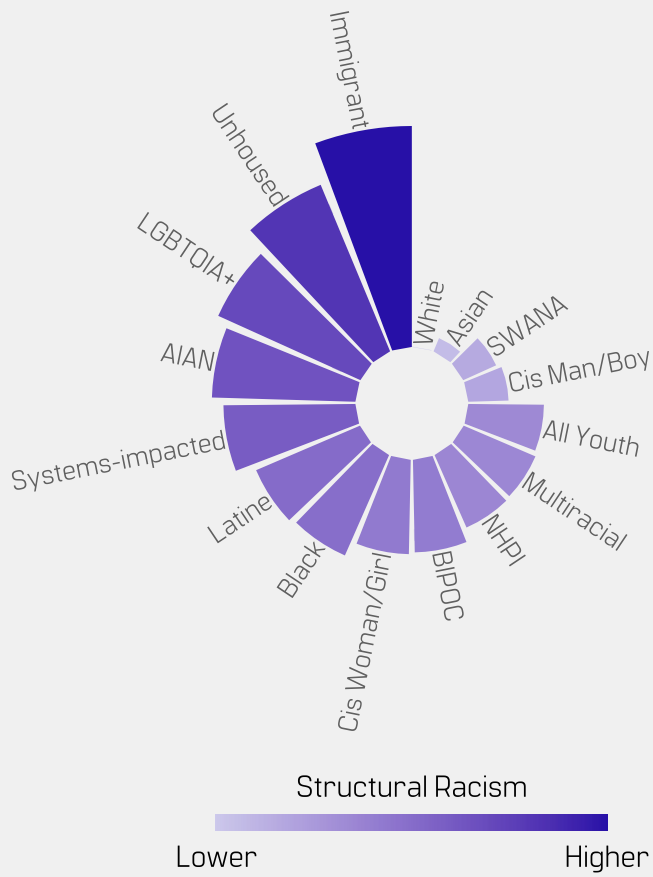
When youth experience structural racism, their level of psychological distress rises. For example, among young people who never experience poor-quality health services, 71.2% report never feeling worthless, whereas only 41.2% of those who always experience poor-quality health services report never feeling worthless.

Structural racism has the third largest effect on youth psychological distress. Youth Council members expressed how structural racism—like insufficient healthcare, housing instability, not enough income, or

fears of deportation—can impact the resources they have to pursue their sparks, another critical factor to positive mental health. Youth Council members also described an “uphill battle” of having to be twice as good when facing racial inequities—a sentiment echoed in a study about Latine undergraduate students.⁶¹ Society frequently places the pressure—and stress—of overcoming systemic inequities on youth of color, expecting them to succeed against the odds instead of ensuring they have fair and equal opportunities to thrive.

Average Expected Structural Racism

All youth should live without experiencing structural racism, but in L.A. County, immigrant, unhoused, and LGBTQIA+ youth experience structural racism the most.



Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Note: AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.



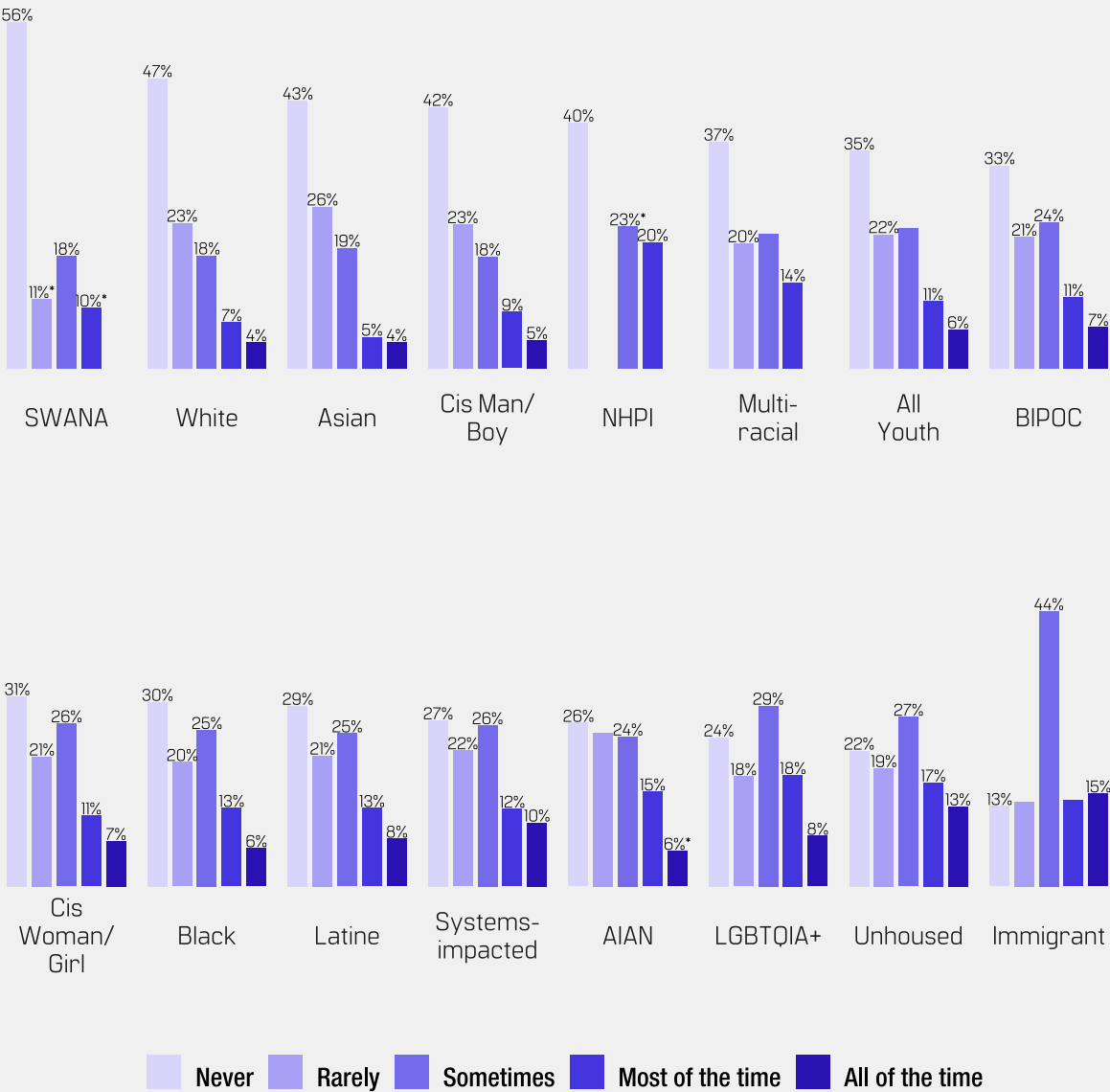
Immigrant, unhoused, and system-impacted youth have among the highest expected rates of experiencing structural racism. Additionally, many young people of color, including AIAN, Black, and Latine youth, exhibit expected rates higher than their White counterparts. Decision-makers and policymakers have enacted harmful laws and practices that have led to these differences. Police across the county disproportionately arrest Black youth in their patrols, foster care systems are more likely to separate AIAN youth, and planning decisions supporting a “not in my backyard” mentality have slowed development of affordable housing.⁶²

Access to quality health care services can support positive mental health, but poor-quality health services are one of the most frequent structural inequities youth face. Immigrant (73.1%), unhoused (56.9%), and LGBTQIA+ (55.1%) young people report that poor-quality health services get in the way of living their best life at least

sometimes, nearly twice as frequently as White youth (29.8%). Similarly, nearly half of systems-impacted youth (48.7%) report that poor-quality health services get in the way of living their best life. Cultural and linguistic barriers and a lack of trust between providers and patients can affect youth access to health care.⁶³ Additionally, structural factors like long wait times, high health care costs even with insurance, and transportation to providers can prevent youth from seeking care. Prior studies have pointed to additional barriers for immigrant and LGBTQIA+ youth. Transgender and nonbinary young people face difficulty finding providers knowledgeable about their issues and may face disrespect from providers, which can worsen their mental health.⁶⁴ Immigrant families may avoid seeking care due to the lack of linguistically and culturally sensitive providers and may fear for their safety in the U.S.⁶⁵

All youth should have access to quality health services, but over half of immigrant, unhoused, and LGBTQIA+ youth report poor quality health services get in the way of living their best life at least sometimes

Survey Question: How often do poor quality health services get in the way of you living your best life?



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

Many young people also face a double burden of navigating the same inequities for their families. For example, immigrant young people may live in mixed immigration status families with constant fear and anxiety about deportation. In cases where youth have other family members impacted by the criminal legal system, they may feel responsible for caring for their families financially when a family member is incarcerated or unable to find employment post-release. Additionally, when youth see distressing news or social media about racism directed at people with their shared identity, their mental health suffers.⁶⁶ These are forms of intergenerational racial trauma that, even if not directly experienced, they influence youth opportunities and ability to thrive.

Despite structural racism, many young people look forward to their future and push forward. Optimism, family, cultural identity, and spirituality are all tied to resiliency among Black and Latine youth.⁶⁷ Youth Council members described finding hope in trying to heal intergenerational trauma and work together toward change, but they doubt current political leaders' will to support that change. In a climate where federal lawmakers are raising barriers for youth of color to thrive, local policymakers have an opportunity to collaborate with youth leaders to enact greater equity across systems.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

"My cultural identity makes me feel excited for the future! I can't wait to see more youth of color from rich backgrounds like mine finding themselves in our cultures and making new cultural traditions" - Youth Council member

Cultural identity is the connectedness and positive regard that youth have toward their racial or ethnic identity, including any shared cultural traditions, values, beliefs, religion, or healing practices. When young people's cultural identities are included, respected, and valued, they thrive. For many youth of color, a strong cultural identity has been linked consistently to higher self-esteem, positive coping strategies, fewer depressive symptoms, and higher academic achievement.⁶⁸ A strong cultural identity can also mitigate the negative effects of racism and discrimination on youth mental health.⁶⁹

The BGYTS measured cultural identity through six items. They measured the strength youth derive from their culture and how connected they feel to cultural traditions. **Cultural identity has one of the greatest effects on self-efficacy and hope for the future, and it is associated with reduced psychological distress.**

Measuring Cultural Identity

- How true are each of these about you and your cultural identity?
- My culture helps me feel good about who I am
 - My culture gives me strength
 - My culture is important to me
 - I feel connected to the spiritual/religious traditions of the culture I was raised in
 - I feel connected to my ancestors
 - I feel like I am part of something greater than myself

Response Options: Never true, Sometimes true, Often true, Always true

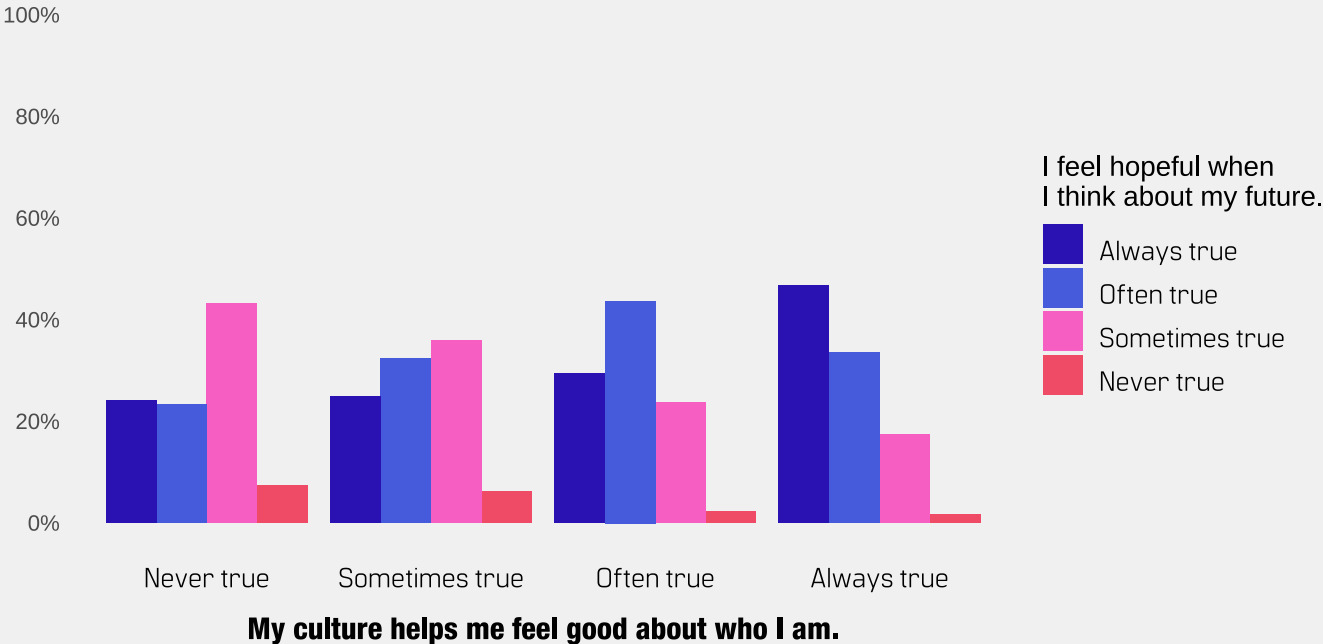
Adapted from: CA Reducing Disparities Project
Statewide Evaluation's Cultural Connectedness Scale
developed by the LMU Psychology Applied Research Center⁷⁰

When young people report that their culture helps them feel good about who they are, they also report feeling more hopeful about the future. **About 46.7% of youth who say their culture *always* helps them feel good about who they are *always* feel hopeful about their future, compared to only 24.1% of young people who say that their culture *never* helps them feel good.** Therefore, when youth derive strength from their culture, they are nearly twice as likely to feel hopeful about their future. Youth Council members described

how their cultural identity gives them a greater sense of purpose and community. It provides a sense of belonging and helps them feel hopeful, not just about their own future, but their greater community.

"My cultural identity dictates hope because the health of my community is part of my own health as well." - Youth Council member

When youth have a positive cultural identity, they have more hope for the future



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

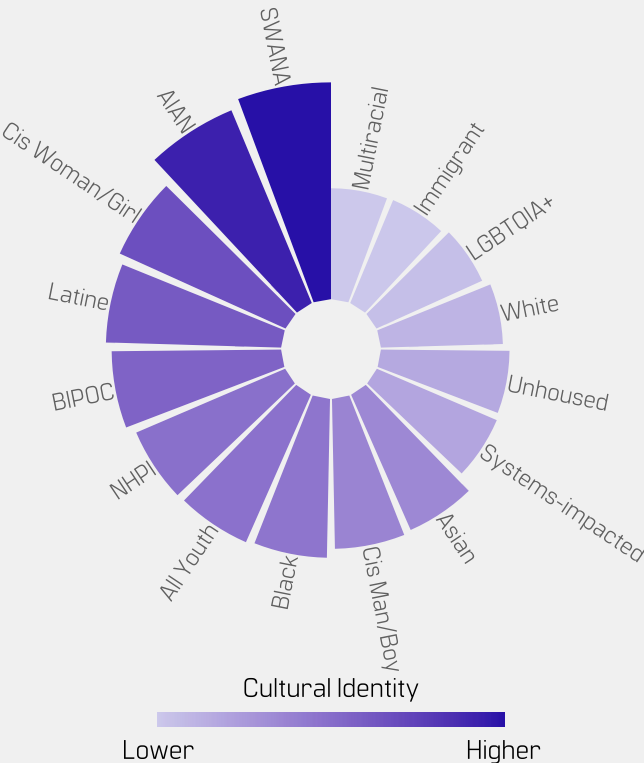
Many young people derive strength and pride from their culture. Decision-makers, policymakers, and practitioners can do more to strengthen the cultural identity experienced by some young people, while also addressing the challenges that hinder cultural identity for other youth.

SWANA and AIAN youth on average have the highest expected levels of cultural identity, while Multiracial, Asian, and White youth have the lowest. Immigrant and LGBTQIA+ youth have some of the lowest levels of cultural identity. Adolescence is a pivotal time when young people develop their identities. Their success in doing so relies on many structural, familial, and cultural factors. Multiracial and LGBTQIA+ youth face added

stressors in integrating multiple identities.⁷¹ Multiracial youth may often experience conflicting identities or even feel excluded from all of their cultural identities. Youth Council members described how having multiple racial identities can make it difficult to find a sense of belonging in either group—feeling forced to choose a side instead of being able to embrace all their identities. Similarly, LGBTQIA+ youth develop their ethnic, sexual, and gender identities simultaneously. LGBTQIA+ youth may face negative beliefs about their sexual or gender identity within their own racial or ethnic group. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ youth of color may face racism within the White-dominant LGBTQIA+ community and male LGBTQIA+ youth may face beliefs about hypermasculinity in their ethnic identity as they try to develop their own sexual and gender identity.⁷²

Average Expected Cultural Identity

All youth should be able to have a strong cultural identity. Multiracial, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ youth on average feel less connected to their cultural identity.



Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. Note: AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

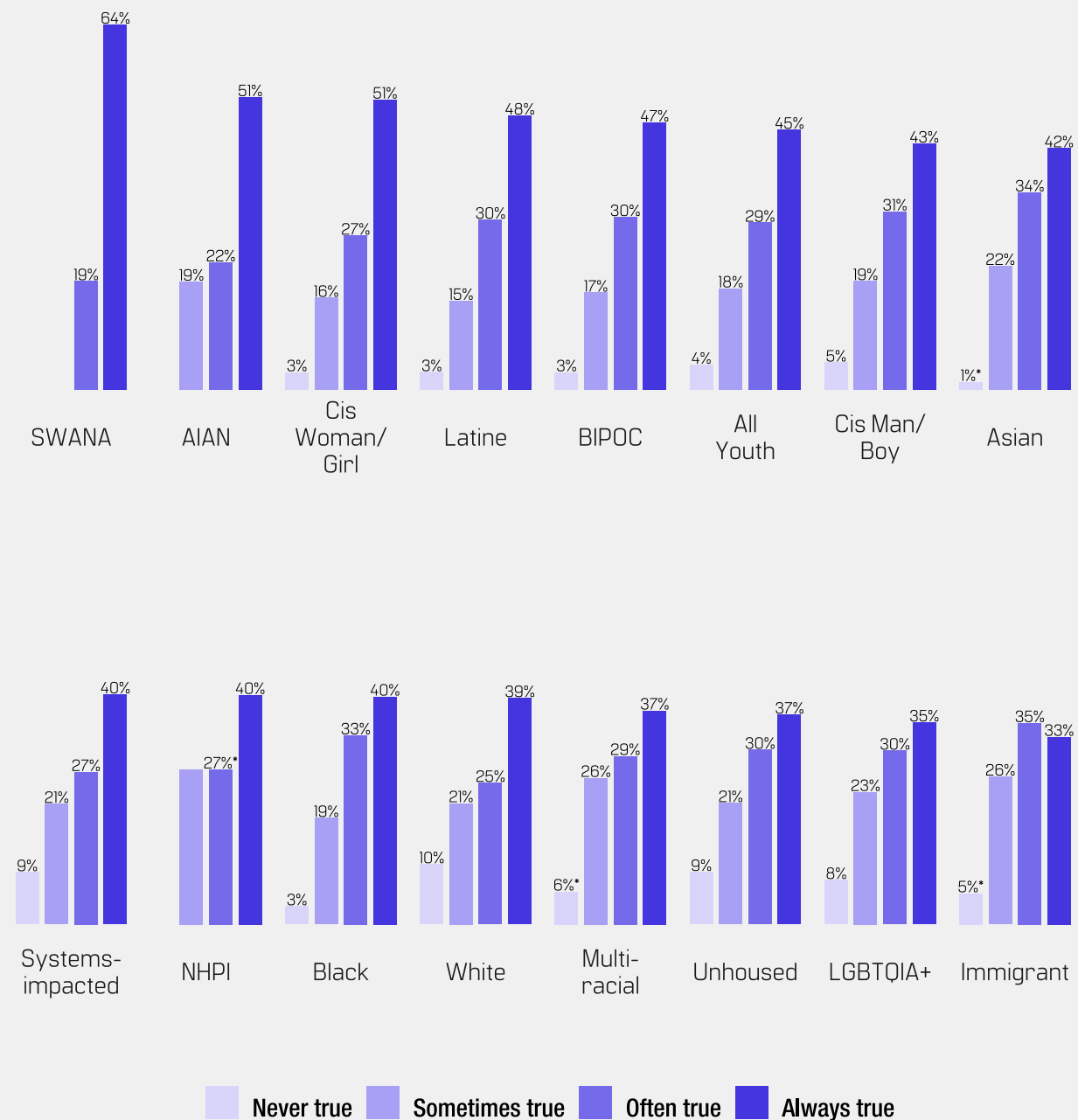
Whether or not youth believe their culture helps them feel good about who they are has the greatest effect on overall cultural identity. More than half of young SWANA (63.6%), AIAN (51%), and cisgender women/girls (50.6%) report their cultural identity *always* helps them feel good about who they are. However, only about one in three LGBTQIA+ (35.2%) and immigrant youth (32.7%) always report this. Cultural identity, and how good youth feel about their culture, is shaped by racism, discrimination, and immigration journeys. Immigrant young people who may have been forced to migrate due to extreme poverty, conflict, violence, or persecution may struggle to develop a positive ethnic identity. Discrimination, language barriers, and exclusionary discourse may prevent these young people from developing a positive cultural identity where they distance themselves from their ethnic group to avoid discrimination.⁷³ Similarly, some AAPI families may avoid talking about racism--only focusing on the positive aspects of identity. Some research has tied honest discussions that prepare youth for racial bias to more positive cultural identity formation.⁷⁴

Young people should be able to feel embraced for all their identities in all spaces. Uplifting and strengthening cultural identities is essential to challenging racism, moderating the effects of racism, and facilitating youth thriving. Policymakers, mental health professionals, and CBOs can help create inclusive spaces and programs that allow for all dimensions of youth identities. These efforts are especially important given rising attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion that aim to erase the accomplishments of people of color from history.

"[My cultural identity] reminds me that my culture is just as talented as others."
- Youth Council member

Cultural identity matters to youth confidence and hope, and more than half of SWANA, AIAN, and cisgender girl youth reported that their culture always helps them feel good about who they are

Survey Question: My culture helps me feel good about who I am



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

Black Youth Resiliency and Hope

Too often research and policymakers overlook the remarkable resilience of Black youth and families or fail to understand their unique strengths. In the BGYTS data, Black young people consistently experience more microaggressions and structural inequities, yet simultaneously report relatively lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of hope for their future. One response could be to gloss over the needs of Black youth—based on their higher hope and positive mental health—but this would disregard the tremendous challenges Black youth and their families have faced, and despite which they persisted and often succeeded through. Alternatively, leaders can seek to acknowledge, understand, and learn from the hope and resilience of Black youth.

In the county, Black youth have higher levels of hope than their non-Black counterparts even when accounting for structural racism or systems-impacted status. About four in five Black young people (81%) have hope for their future *often* or *always* compared to 71.3% of their non-Black counterparts. When Black youth experience structural racism, their hope remains higher. For instance, 82.9% of Black young people who report not having enough affordable housing have hope for their future *often* or *always* compared to 69.4% of non-Black young people who experience the same inequity. And among systems-impacted youth, Black youth are more hopeful. About 79.2% of Black, systems-impacted young people report *often* or *always* feeling hopeful about their future, compared to 72.1% of non-Black, systems-impacted youth—a significant difference. This is in spite of the fact that systems-impacted, Black youth are more likely to experience structural inequities compared to their systems-impacted, non-Black counterparts.⁷⁵

Caring families and cultural identity contribute to this hope and lower levels of psychological distress. Having someone to go to decreases psychological distress among Black youth experiencing lack of

affordable housing. About 43.4% of these housing-impacted Black youth who also *often* or *always* have someone to turn to report feeling worthless at least a little of the time compared to 61.1% of housing-impacted Black youth who *never* or only *sometimes* have someone to turn to—nearly a 20 percentage point difference. Those who have higher reported cultural identity are more likely to have hope for the future compared to their counterparts with lower levels of cultural identity.⁷⁶

Though Black youth may thrive in the face of structural inequities, these inequities still affect Black youth, families, and communities. They affect their mental health as well as their cultural identity and relationships. Black young people who report not enough affordable housing gets in the way of living their best life have higher reported feelings of worthlessness compared to Black young people who never report lack of affordable housing gets in the way of living their best life.⁷⁷ When Black young people face a lack of affordable housing, they are also less likely to feel positive about their culture or have someone to turn to—67.8% of those affected by housing issues have someone to rely on often or always, compared to 77.8% of those unaffected. This is problematic given that having supportive relationships and a strong cultural identity can protect against youth psychological distress.

Community cohesion, family relationships, racial identity, and spirituality are critical protective factors that help moderate the effects of racism and improve resiliency in Black youth.⁷⁸ According to the BGYTS findings, caring families and relationships and cultural identity each serve as protective factors for Black youth facing structural inequities. Understanding these protective factors is vital to help Black youth thrive. Policymakers and system leaders should support the strengths of Black families and culture and must act to reverse structural inequities.

Passions and Sparks



"Having a spark in your life helps keep you motivated, centered, and emotionally stable. It has a positive impact on your mental health because it reminds you what is keeping you moving forward."
- Youth Council member

When youth have sparks—deep passions or interests that give them energy and purpose—they experience positive mental health and a greater sense of hope for the future. With guidance from the BVYTS, policymakers, decision-makers, and program developers have an opportunity to invest in youth sparks and propel them into a brighter future. The BVYTS asked young people if they had a spark in their life and what support or barriers they had to pursuing their spark.

Analysis shows that one in four young people (24.6%) do not have a spark or are unsure whether they have a spark. Furthermore, when asked how many adults in their lives know their sparks and help them pursue them, nearly one in 10 young people respond with "None" (9.4%) and 16.5% respond with "Not sure." This means that over one in four young people lack meaningful adult support around the passions that give their lives direction. These low rates are a cause for concern, especially because our results show that **having a spark is associated with lower psychological distress and higher levels of self-efficacy and hope for the future at statistically significant levels.**

Measuring Sparks

When people are really happy, energized, and passionate about their talents, interests, or hobbies, we say they have a spark in their life. This spark is more than just interesting or fun for them. They are passionate about it. It gives them joy and energy. It is a really important part of their life that gives them real purpose, direction, or focus. Do you have this kind of spark in your life?

Response Options: Yes, No, Not sure

How many adults really know what your sparks are and help you go after them?

Response Options: None, One, Two, Three or more, Not sure

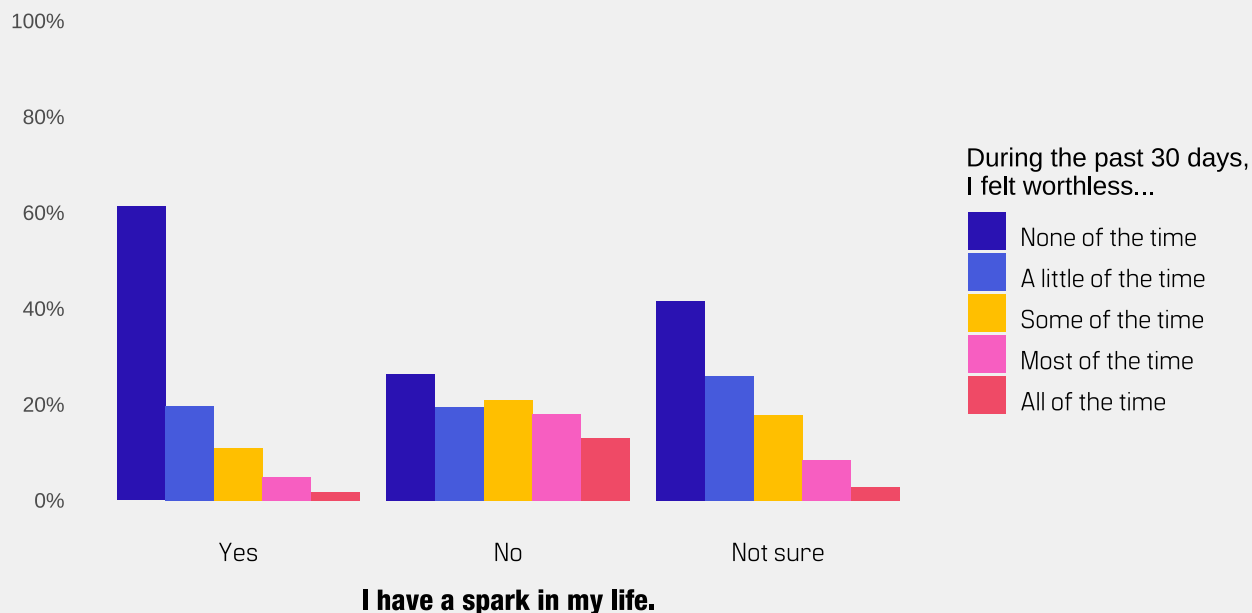
Adapted from: Search Institute Thriving Orientation Survey (Benson and Scales 2009)⁷⁹

THE IMPACT OF SPARKS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

"Having a spark can often be the thing that keeps me out of/pulls me out of a slump/depressive episode. Doing something I know I enjoy, like journaling, can really help me gain some energy and motivation, even if I didn't really feel like doing it at first. When I don't have time for my sparks, I can feel myself becoming more and more mentally drained."
- Youth Council member

Sparks are a powerful protective factor against poor mental health outcomes. The BGYTS shows that when young people have a spark in their lives, their psychological distress levels are significantly lower. **In our analyses, we see that among youth who *do not* have a spark in their life, around 26.4% *never* feel worthless. However, among youth who *do* have a spark in their life, that number jumps to 61.3%, a rate that is 2.3 times greater.** This striking difference underscores the critical role that sparks play in supporting young people's mental well-being. Sparks help young people stay grounded and resilient amidst adversity. As another young person put it, sparks provide "a safe space for me to lean back on, especially in times of stress." Thus, supporting youth in identifying and nurturing their sparks is a critical component to ensuring all youth in the county flourish.

When youth have a "spark" in life, they are less likely to feel worthless



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

THE IMPACT OF SPARKS ON SELF-EFFICACY AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

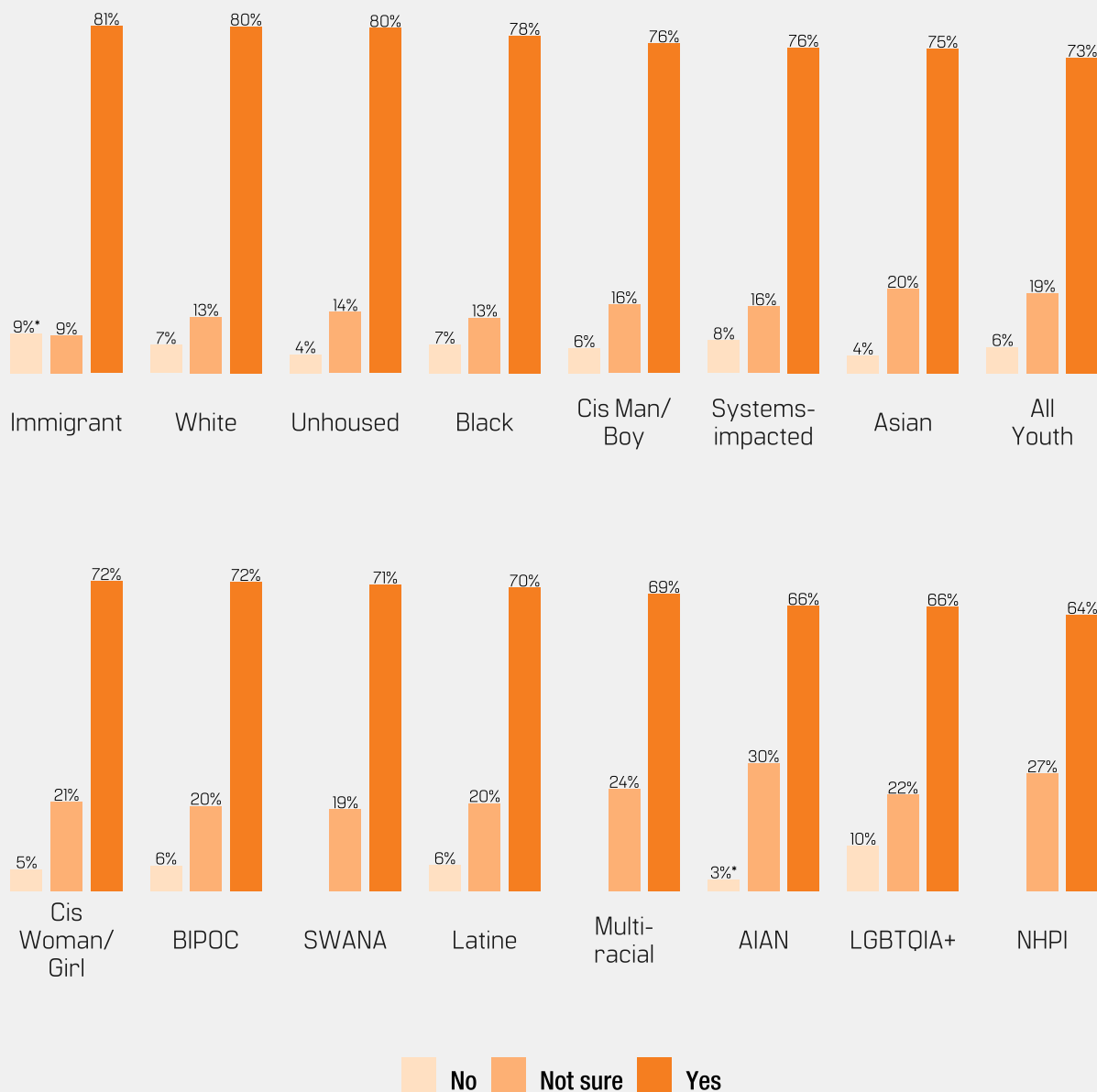
"Having a special interest in environmental justice has given me a community of like-minded people in my city to confide in, relate to, and build friendships/mentorships with. It gave me the passion to pursue the major I'm doing in college and it makes me feel like I am doing something good for the world by contributing my life and career to the cause. It gave me the confidence to join environmental justice clubs in college and high school where I meet even more of a community. These people help me feel hopeful in times like this when there are so many attacks on the environment in our current presidential administration."

- Youth Council member

Previous research has shown the positive effects of sparks on a variety of life outcomes. In a national survey of 1,817 adolescents, youth who had a combination of sparks, relational opportunities, and a sense of empowerment had better outcomes.⁸⁰ Furthermore, **BYVTS analysis finds that among youth who have a spark, 42.2% of them *always* feel hopeful for the future.** For comparison, among young people who do not have a spark, 12.4% of them *always* feel hopeful for the future.⁸¹ This dramatic difference underscores how important sparks are to fostering young people's hopes for their future. It is important to uplift that self-efficacy and hope for the future go hand in hand. Youth Council members described how having a spark gives them more confidence in their abilities and something to look forward to. When young people have a spark, it fosters more self-efficacy, giving them more self-confidence in their present-day lives and developing a greater sense of self-determination so they can thrive in the future.

Having a spark in life supports emotional health and hope for the future, but LGBTQIA+ and NHPI youth are least likely to believe they have a spark

Survey Question: When people are really happy, energized, and passionate about their talents, interests, or hobbies, we say they have a “spark” in their life.... Do you have this kind of spark in your life?



Data Source: Catalyst California's calculations of Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, 2024. *Unstable for policy purposes; groups with fewer than five individuals are omitted for privacy purposes. AIAN=American Indian & Alaska Native; NHPI=Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander; SWANA=Southwest Asian & North African. For more information, see the 2025 Bold Vision Youth Thriving Report Methodology.

HOW YOUTH ARE DOING

BVYTS analysis finds that NHPI (64%), LGBTQIA+ (65.9%), AIAN (66.1%), Multiracial (68.9%), and Latine (70.4%) youth have the lowest rates of having a spark, while immigrant (80.5%), White (80.4%), unhoused (80%), Black (78.3%), and cisgender men/boys (76.5%) have the highest rates of having a spark. Among young people who report not having a spark, the top reasons are

1. "I don't know what my talents, interests, or hobbies are" (30.1%)
2. "I don't have enough time for them" (14.7%)
3. "I don't have enough money to pay for the equipment, supplies, lessons, etc" (13.8%)
4. "I feel too sad or anxious to figure them out" (12.3%).

Nearly one out of three young people who report lacking a spark simply don't know what their talents, interests, or hobbies are. This finding underscores the need to expose youth to a broad array of creative experiences and supportive mentorship programs that can help them discover and nurture their interests. The other top-cited reasons—lack of time, lack of money, and mental health struggles—point even more directly to broader structural inequities that impact young people's ability to thrive. Time is a critical health

resource. We all need time to cook healthy meals, check in with our doctor, exercise regularly, build meaningful relationships, and engage in our hobbies. However, low-income communities are less likely to have the time to spend on their health and well-being, instead having to focus on economic survival and caretaking, which is often an underpaid or unpaid labor activity.⁸² One young person shared that there aren't opportunities like jobs and affordable housing in the Antelope Valley, making it difficult for youth to have their basic needs met and identify their sparks. Other young people mentioned how they have sparks, but they don't have access to the resources to nurture them. This is especially relevant for youth who have creative and arts-related sparks: they said art programs are often the first departments in schools to face budget cuts.

Strikingly, more than half of youth in every demographic group report having a spark in their life. County leaders have an opportunity to support these untapped passions and talents—for the future of these young people and the county. We urge policymakers and funders to invest in the full range of youth development—by meeting young people's basic economic needs, providing them with opportunities to discover sparks, and dedicating resources to the sparks they already have.

Sparks among unhoused, systems-impacted, and immigrant youth

BVYTS analysis finds that unhoused, systems-impacted, and immigrant youth have sparks at remarkably high rates, despite facing immense structural barriers. Community organizers and researchers who work with these groups note their high levels of resiliency and grit that help them cope with current circumstances.⁸³ For instance, many undocumented young people working in the U.S. derive meaning and passion from sending remittances to their families.⁸⁴ Yet although resilience is a key factor for that helps them persevere through difficult life circumstances and gives them hope for the future, it is not an unlimited resource. Research has shown that for unhoused youth, feelings of resiliency decrease the longer they remain without stable housing.⁸⁵

To truly support these young people, we must go beyond admiring their resilience to create systems that actively nourish their sparks. That means investing in housing, education, mentorship, and policies that make space for their goals, not just their survival. Research on youth in the juvenile justice system has shown that when they can envision a future and make concrete plans, they are better equipped to reenter society.⁸⁶ As one Youth Council member shared "Having a spark gives me something to look forward for and to put myself into." While we can make space to praise youth for their resilience, we must also create structures that meet their basic needs and help turn their sparks into sustainable pathways forward.

What the Youth Council wants policymakers to know

During one of its Youth Council sessions, Catalyst California asked the Youth Council members what they would like policymakers to know. They urged people in power to actively listen to, learn from, and invest in youth. They wanted policymakers to act on the BGYTS data and authentically engage youth in planning their response to it.

I WANT POLICYMAKERS TO KNOW...

"That people know what they need."

"That youth of color and marginalized youth are not a lost cause. We have just not been invested in. The best way to improve marginalized youth's lives is to start listening to what we need and put your money where your mouth is—we are worth it!"

"That there are correlations between hate speech and mental health and that the allocation of attention needs to be changed."

"That youth are the future. We should prioritize youth."

"When a community thrives we all do better as a whole."

"That appealing to the center by denying the welfare of youth of color or people of color is not popular nor is it right. They should pay attention to this data and focus on issues actually affecting us rather than using issues that only affect a small population as talking points for re-election."

"[Policymakers] are not doing enough."

"Youth thriving hinges on understanding and acknowledging identity and its intersectionalities. It is essential to address this and really identify the structural inequities and how important it is to validate youth by creating spaces and opportunities through community hubs, jobs, etc."

"More spaces need to be created for all ages, races, etc. to end stigma and to start nurturing new minds."



Recommendations

This first-of-its-kind report centers L.A. County's BIPOC youth voices and elevates their lived experiences, while providing a powerful tool for advocates, policymakers, and community leaders committed to building a more equitable Los Angeles. We present a comprehensive set of youth-centered recommendations based on the data analysis from the BVYTS as well as the Youth Council's perspectives.

IMPROVE MATERIAL CONDITIONS FOR BIPOC YOUTH AND FAMILIES.

According to the BVYTS data, immigrant, unhoused, system-impacted, and many young people of color experience structural inequities for many of their material conditions. It is critical that county leaders and decision-makers invest in more resources and basic needs for BIPOC youth, as it's difficult for them to thrive if they do not have affordable housing, cannot access quality healthcare, and live in poverty. Ultimately, it is about improving material conditions not just for them but for their families and communities as well. This support can include, but should not be limited to, workforce development programs to promote youth employment and economic inclusion, efforts to address the county's affordable housing crisis, and policies that improve youth's access to quality healthcare.

"I hope LA County will care about lower income and middle-income people/ neighborhoods as much as they care about West LA and wealthier parts. I wish they could invest as much in us and care about what is affecting us the same amount." - Youth Council member

ENSURE BIPOC YOUTH CAN ACCESS FULL WRAP-AROUND SERVICES THAT NOURISH THEIR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.

All youth should have freedom from psychological distress so that they can thrive and reach their fullest potential, but this is not happening in the county. Our analysis shows that LGBTQIA+ youth, immigrant youth, systems-impacted youth, and unhoused youth experience particularly high levels of psychological distress compared to other demographic groups. Policymakers, decision-makers, and practitioners must work toward an equitable society where all youth can access full wrap-around services for their social and emotional well-being— including mental health resources and services, and mentorship opportunities. These services must also be culturally affirming to increase their effectiveness in reaching and serving vulnerable youth. Additionally, all forms of oppression and the intersectionality of youth identities, such as their immigration status, gender, or sexuality, must be considered when designing programming that supports L.A. County youth.

"In the future, I hope youth in LA County will have full access to the resources they need for their own individual pursuit of happiness. I hope to see places, monuments, arcades, shops, grocery stores, homes, streets, murals, and everything nice that supports the culture of the minorities." - Youth Council member

CREATE AND INVEST IN SAFE, AFFIRMING SPACES FOR BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, AND IMMIGRANT YOUTH THAT PROMOTE STRONG CULTURAL IDENTITY.

Findings from the survey show that experiences with microaggressions are associated with higher levels of psychological distress while having strong cultural identity and opportunities for community involvement is associated with youth feeling hopeful. Unfortunately, immigrant, Black, unhoused, SWANA, systems-impacted, and LGBTQIA+ youth are most likely to experience microaggressions, while White youth are least likely to experience them. Similarly, findings show that immigrant and LGBTQIA+ youth have some of the lowest levels of cultural identity. Addressing microaggressions goes hand in hand with supporting youth cultural identities. County, school, and community organization leaders can examine practices or interactions in their services that discriminate against or exclude BIPOC and other vulnerable youth. They can reduce microaggressions and discrimination while increasing opportunities to affirm and promote the cultural identity of youth. This is especially important now that the federal government is devaluing the contributions of BIPOC communities.

Additionally, many young people find safe and affirming spaces through CBOs and coalitions, and policymakers must support and resource these organizations so they can provide these spaces. For example, a member of the Steering Committee spoke of Dream Resource Centers in L.A. Unified School District schools as a safe space for immigrant youth that should

be expanded. Another member highlighted the Brothers, Sons, Selves Coalition as another safe space. Youth Council members said they experienced genuine care and solidarity in community organizations. This was more evident when they had opportunities to interact with adults who shared similar lived experiences. Youth Council members pointed to the importance of positive portrayals of other cultures and people of color. They described how acknowledging the contributions of people of color provides critical spaces for communities to feel pride and helps others to unlearn racial biases. These testimonies are why we encourage county leaders to look for safe spaces staffed by adults who share youth identities and can effectively mentor them.

"How do we create safe spaces where young folks can be themselves and... looking for mentorship? At the core young folks want to feel safe." - Steering Committee member

INVEST IN CARING FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS.

County decision-makers need to pay more attention to the investments needed to enhance caring relationships in the lives of our local youth. The survey findings show that caring families and relationships is the strongest predictor of self-efficacy and hope, and has a positive effect on psychological distress. Quality relationships and social connections are also central to the cultural identity of young people. Notably, young people have various levels of caring families and relationships. On average, unhoused, systems-impacted, immigrant, and Black youth are least likely to feel they have someone to go to. Youth Council members described how some young people may avoid relying on their families if their family members are navigating their immigration, criminal legal, or housing status. It is difficult to rely on an adult in your life when you have a problem, if they themselves are overtaxed or burdened trying to find the resources they need. Adults mentoring and providing guidance to youth must also be supported with the material and emotional resources they need.

PROMOTE THE ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPARKS.

Young people need outlets that relieve their stress, spark joy, and give purpose. These sparks can be individual hobbies like sports, journaling, or music. They can be opportunities for community involvement with a higher purpose of a higher goal such as environmental justice.

The survey analysis finds that sparks and passions foster more self-confidence and help BIPOC youth thrive. Unfortunately, many young people in the county lack access to the resources to nurture their sparks. NHPI, LGBTQIA+, AIAN, Multiracial, and Latine youth have the lowest rates of having a spark. For this reason, it is critical that policymakers and community leaders work to promote opportunities for youth to access and develop sparks. This could consist of improving young people's material conditions – as youth who struggle to have their basic needs met will have trouble accessing and developing sparks. By helping youth get access to healthy foods, mental health resources, livable wages, quality education and housing, policymakers and advocates will provide youth with the opportunity and time to nurture sparks and passions. Furthermore, policymakers and advocates should promote youth access to a broad array of creative experiences, development programs, and supportive mentorship opportunities that can help them learn what their spark is and pursue it. Unfortunately, many young people only have access to these extracurricular or creative programs through schools, and they are often vulnerable to budget cuts.

"In the future, I hope youth in LA County will be able to have more opportunities and find their spark." - Youth Council member



Conclusion

Bold Vision remains committed to the core premise that all youth in Los Angeles County deserve to thrive. Unfortunately, for many BIPOC youth in L.A. County, the ability to thrive is hindered by deeply rooted inequities resulting from historically discriminatory systems, policies, and practices. Despite previous research focused on the performance of BIPOC youth, what has remained missing is a more nuanced understanding of how youth perceive their own well-being. This first-in-the-county survey does just that by centering the voices of youth to better understand the factors influencing their lives.

For the first time, the survey thoroughly measures how structural inequities impact BIPOC youth in L.A. County. The more frequently youth experience structural inequities including lack of affordable housing, poor quality health care, or lack of income, the higher their psychological distress. Not studied here, but alluded to by Youth Council members, is how these same structural inequities affect the adults in their lives, and their availability to youth in their times of need. This is why policymakers and decision-makers should invest more in programs and resources that improve youth mental health, including those that improve the material conditions of youth and their families and the stability of their communities.

At a time when L.A. County faces a tight budget reality, it is important that policymakers invest in the county's future by allocating sufficient resources to the programs that support BIPOC youth. Ultimately, more is also needed to increase the level of sparks that BIPOC youth need to fully thrive. BIPOC youth represent more

than 80% of the youth population in L.A. County, and systemic injustices continue harming them on a regular basis. County public officials must now listen to the voices of regional youth that clearly laid out their needs in this survey report. Our future depends on their response.

To access a detailed methodology and more information about the Bold Vision Youth Thriving Survey, please visit the Bold Vision website (www.boldvisionla.org) and Catalyst California's GitHub page (github.com/catalystcalifornia/boldvision_youththriving).

ENDNOTES

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