

EVALUATION OF THE MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM AT HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK

2023-2024

EVALUATION FINDINGS



REPORT PREPARED BY INDIGO CULTURAL CENTER



INDIGO
CULTURAL CENTER

FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK



**HOMELESS
CHILDREN'S
NETWORK**

GRATITUDE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO OUR ANCESTORS...

“We honor the gifts, resilience, and sacrifices of our Black ancestors, particularly those who toiled the land and built the institutions that established the City of San Francisco’s wealth and freedom, despite never being compensated nor fully realizing their own sovereignty. We acknowledge this exploitation of not only labor, but of our humanity and through this process are working to repair some of the harms done by public and private actors. Because of their work, we are here and will invest in the descendants of their legacy.”

~ San Francisco’s Reparations Plan Report, 2023



LEADING WITH GRATITUDE

We express deep gratitude to the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development whose generous funding made this evaluation possible.

Thank you to the entire Homeless Children’s Network community. This has taken a collective effort, and everyone has come together seamlessly to bring it full circle.

Thank you to the **Ma’at Youth Leadership Program** partners and community members who contributed to this evaluation. People who provided their expertise and time included: healers, families, advocates, community organizers, practitioners, trainers, and community leaders. Your experiences are the valued knowledge we seek to uplift. Thank you for so graciously sharing your expertise, time, energy, vulnerability, and wisdom. You helped us truly see the sense of community and cohesion within and among the Black community(ies) of San Francisco.

Thank you to Rio Holaday for the vibrant, customized art work. Your process of getting to know the programs and the data not only make this report more meaningful, but this process helped us understand the data and the work at HCN in more expansive and integrated ways. To learn more about Rio’s work, please visit: (@rioholaday on Instagram) or (www.rioholaday.com).

Thank you to our very own, Krystle Canare, for the fabulous design of this report.

Thank you to our amazing Indigo Cultural Center team. Your assistance and amazing attention to detail in entering, managing and analyzing various aspects of the vast amounts of data for this evaluation. And for all the additional administrative and emotional support required to move this work to completion in such a short amount of time.



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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In 2024, Homeless Children’s Network engaged Indigo Cultural Center to conduct an external evaluation on the **Ma’at Youth Leadership Program**,¹ which engages Black youth in the City of San Francisco from the ages of 12-18 years old. The program goals are to develop leadership and life skills by creating a culture of wellness and healing.

The main objectives of this report are to:

- 🌿 Describe the **Ma’at Youth Leadership Program** in a way that contextualizes it as one aspect of Black community mental health,
- 🌿 Describe the **Ma’at Youth Leadership** participants,
- 🌿 Demonstrate whether key objectives were met,
- 🌿 Share feedback about experiences and impact from **Ma’at Youth Leadership** participants, and
- 🌿 Explore the factors and conditions necessary to deliver this service to the Black community in San Francisco.



1 Ma'at comprised the ancient Egyptian concepts of truth, balance, order, harmony, law, morality, and justice.

INDIGO CULTURAL CENTER: A NOTE ABOUT THE AGENCY & PEOPLE CONDUCTING THIS EVALUATION

The Institute of Child Development Research and Social Change at Indigo Cultural Center is an action-research firm that specializes in infant and early childhood research and evaluation conducted with an anti-racist lens. Indigo Cultural Center (a predominantly BIPOC-staffed organization) is led by executive director Dr. Eva Marie Shivers who identifies as an African American cis-gendered woman. Dr. Shivers led this current evaluation with a small team that consisted of a bi-racial Black and Mexican American woman, a Black woman, two Filipina/Filipina American women, and one white woman.

Indigo Cultural Center’s mission is to conduct rigorous policy-relevant research on mental health, education, and development by partnering with community agencies and public agencies that are dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth and families in BIPOC communities. Since its inception, Indigo Cultural Center has employed the use of **community based participatory research** in all our evaluations.

What this means is that we use a collaborative model and working style that involves our clients – who we prefer to call ‘partners’ – in the planning, implementation, interpretation, and dissemination processes of evaluation. We recognize the strengths that our partners bring to each evaluation project, and we build on those assets by consulting with our partners initially and at key milestones throughout the project, integrating their input and knowledge into all aspects of the project, asking for feedback on a regular basis, and seeking consensus on key issues and outcomes.



INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

We begin this evaluation report by including a description of several background factors and the context in which this program took place. Over the past several years there has been a call to decolonize the field of mental health. One important way we can do this is by expanding the construct of wellness to include a more explicit focus on community mental health in Black and Brown communities. It increasingly imperative that we not perpetuate the mainstream pathology-narrative of people in our communities by failing to acknowledge the broader forces that impact the well-being of communities that have experienced historic and current marginalization and oppression. Community-based programs designed to promote healing, wellness and positive mental health do not simply unfold in isolation. The work that Homeless Children's Network embodies is emergent work that will always reflect the time and space in which it is happening.

Indeed, African and Pan-African philosophy teaches us that "all things have an impact on each other, and this interconnectedness and interplay is universal" (Marumo & Chakale, 2018).



VOICE AND TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS REPORT

The authors of this report employ the use of feminist methodology and use of first-person voice (e.g., 'we', 'us')

(Leggat-Cook, 2010; Mitchel, 2017).

- Throughout this report we use the terms Black and African American interchangeably.
- We do not capitalize white but capitalize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to challenge the power of whiteness, decenter it, and elevate Black and BIPOC perspectives.
- We use LGBTQIA+ as an acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual" with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community.
- We use queer to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities.
- We use gender rather than sex as an inclusive term that acknowledges that gender is socially and contextually constructed and is a multidimensional facet of identity.



All things have an impact on each other, and this interconnectedness and interplay is universal.

Marumo & Chakale

BLACK COMMUNITY IN SAN FRANCISCO

The City of San Francisco is often lauded for its diversity and progressive values. However, after decades of structural racism, the Black population in San Francisco which was once 13.5% has eroded to 5%. The Black San Franciscans that remain are largely segregated in communities that have experienced marginalization, exclusionary policies, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. Once considered the 'Harlem of the West,' San Francisco has been home to a vibrant population of Black residents since the city's inception. For one to fully comprehend the present circumstances and trends within the Black San Franciscan community, it is vital that we revisit the rich history of Black San Franciscans and their continued impact on the city's culture and growth. ²

WORLD WAR II

During World War II, Black Americans from the South were recruited by employers to fill the need for shipbuilding labor and jobs left vacant by Japanese Americans who were forcibly sent to internment camps. While Black Americans were heavily recruited to San Francisco, they had few options for housing and were often funneled into what are now considered historically Black neighborhoods such as the Fillmore District, the Western Addition, and Bayview-Hunters Point.

² For an excellent review of Black San Franciscan history, please see: "African American Citywide Historic Context Statement, 2024, Prepared for City and County of San Francisco, San Francisco Planning Department." Retrieved on July 26, 2024: <https://sfplanning.org/african-american-historic-context-statement>

POST-WORLD WAR II

During the Post-World War II period, Black Americans were faced with housing shortages as GIs and Japanese Americans returned to San Francisco and anti-Black discrimination in the private housing market left them unable to purchase homes. Black communities quickly became overcrowded and under-resourced. Moreover, competition from returning GIs, the closing of shipyards, and lack of representation from labor unions led to high unemployment rates among the Black community.



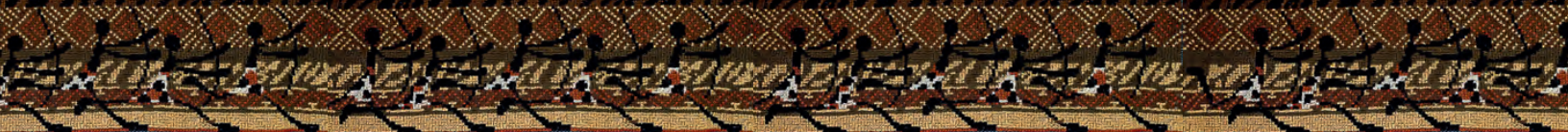
1960 - 1979

In the late 1960s, racial tensions continued to rise against the Black community. During this time, the 1949 Housing Act allowed the city to demolish and reconstruct neighborhoods considered “slums”. Thus, a significant number of homes and places of business in Black neighborhoods such as the Fillmore District were demolished (Whitney, 2024). This led to an exodus of Black-owned businesses and Black residents from the city. In 1970, there began a significant decline in San Francisco’s Black residents since the 1920s, when it was 13% of the city’s population.

1980-2009

By the 1980s, redevelopment projects were completed, but new homes were too expensive for the majority of former San Francisco residents to afford. Then, the 1990s-2010s brought tech booms which created a strong demand for skilled tech workers in the Bay Area and increased rates of gentrification of historically Black and immigrant neighborhoods in San Francisco, contributing to rising costs of living and further displacement of the Black community.





2010 - PRESENT

Looking ahead to the last decade, Black San Franciscans have been faced with even more challenges as they continue to experience rising police brutality and use of force compared to white people (Balakrishnan, 2023) and disproportionate rates of hospitalizations and mortality from COVID-19 compared to whites (Cho & Hwang, 2022). Now, the Black community makes up only 5% of the San Francisco population and continues to decline as Black Americans continue to face the lasting impacts of gentrification, discrimination, and anti-Blackness.

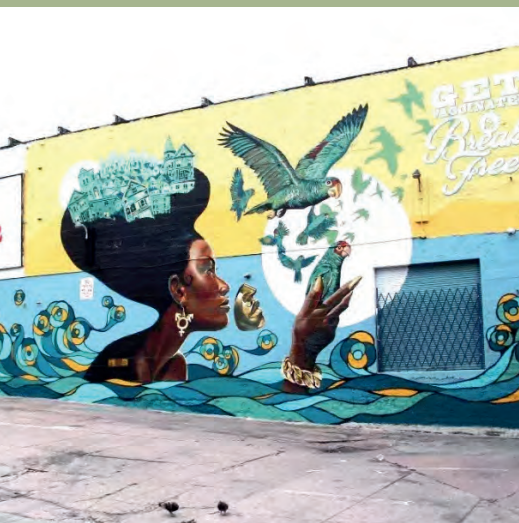
Since the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the City of San Francisco has begun to acknowledge historical racist policies that have disproportionately impacted the Black community. The city has made more direct efforts toward revitalizing Black communities (Health Commission City and County of San Francisco, Resolution No. 20-10; Office of the Mayor of San Francisco, 2021; San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2020, 2023).

The overall vision and goal of one of the biggest revitalizing initiatives is the Dream Keeper Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to address and remedy racially disparate policies within the City of San Francisco so that the dreams of young African Americans and their families are no longer deferred, and they have the needed resources and support to thrive in San Francisco. The first round of funding and grants focused on nine (9) impact areas such as: economic mobility; narrative shift; capacity building; education and enrichment; art and culture; and health and well-being.³

With continued, targeted, and intentional support for the Black San Franciscan community, we may look to a future where Black families can live and continue to nurture their legacies in San Francisco.



³ The City of San Francisco Dream Keeper Initiative: Funding the Dream
<https://www.dreamkeepersf.org/funding>



CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

The Black community has made significant and lasting impacts on the civic, cultural, and economic conditions of San Francisco. For example, the Fillmore District became known as the “Harlem of the West,” a place of rich artistic expression and thriving businesses owned by Black entrepreneurs.

Additionally, San Francisco is home to the rise of many Black community leaders and civil rights activists, who worked diligently to combat racism and discriminatory practices. One example of community leaders who left a lasting impact on San Francisco is the “Big Five,” a group of Black women and mothers whose goals were to improve conditions in Black neighborhoods experiencing severe poverty and discrimination, such as Bayview and Hunters Point. These Black women worked to overturn wrongful evictions and secured funds for infrastructure projects in Bayview-Hunters Point.

In regard to the contributions of Black youth leaders in San Francisco, a poignant example comes from the 1968 African American students’ strike at San Francisco State College (now known as San Francisco State University). Motivated by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Black students protested racist educational practices and teachings. As a result, San Francisco State University’s College of Ethnic Studies housing the Black studies department was established in 1969. These students’ actions had widespread impacts outside of San Francisco, inspiring the establishment of Black studies departments in college campuses across the nation (Chen, 2024).

Despite the longstanding history and significant contributions to San Francisco, Black residents and the Black community are often overlooked and forgotten. Community organizations like Homeless Children’s Network exist to uplift and preserve the rich history of Black San Francisco by attending to the holistic well-being of its residents.





HCN staff at 2023 HCN Retreat in San Francisco, CA



HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK HISTORY

Since 1992, Homeless Children's Network (HCN) has empowered toward a brighter future for children, youth, parents/caregivers, and families in San Francisco who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, formerly homeless, or in generational poverty. HCN was founded by the directors of six homeless and domestic violence shelters to establish a standard of care for San Francisco. Now, HCN is the hub of a Provider Collaborative of over 60+ service agencies and community-based organizations in San Francisco. Their mission is to decrease the trauma of homelessness and domestic violence for children, youth, and families through direct mental and behavioral health services as a response; to empower families; and to increase the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among service providers by unifying a city-wide collaborative to end homelessness and poverty. Three notable and distinguishing factors that describe HCN's work include: a 32 year-long history of building trust-based relationships with both community members and providers; the integration of a strong Afri-centric framework that guides their approach to their clinical mental health and their community mental health services; a committed focus on amplifying the voices of marginalized communities; and the integration of an Afri-centric approach to providing services that includes engaging Black communities in the design and implementation of solutions, including the evaluation of HCN's impact.⁴

⁴ For more history about Homeless Children's Network, please visit: <https://www.hcnkids.org/history>

AFRI-CENTRICITY IN HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK'S PROGRAMMING & APPROACHES

Ubuntu is the essence of HCN's Afri-centric programs. For Black people in this country and around the world, community and interconnectedness – **ubuntu** – is and always has been a vital part of our existence and healing. **Ubuntu** is a term that originates from the Bantu people in South Africa. Ubuntu encapsulates a set of closely related value and belief systems throughout the continent of Africa and throughout Pan-Africa (including the U.S.) that emphasize interconnectedness and humanity towards others. This value system ultimately comes down to the following, “an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world” (Mugumbate & Admire, 2020).



All the programs at HCN and the organizational culture (including who is hired to do Black community work) are influenced and based on an Afri-centric worldview. ‘Afri-centricity’ refers to a way of considering social change and human dynamics that are rooted in African-centered intellectual and (pre-colonial) African philosophies. The main values and concepts that ground an **Afri-centric worldview** include the “interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings; the collective / individual identity and the collective / inclusive nature of family structure; the oneness of mind, body, and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships” (Graham, 1999, p. 258).

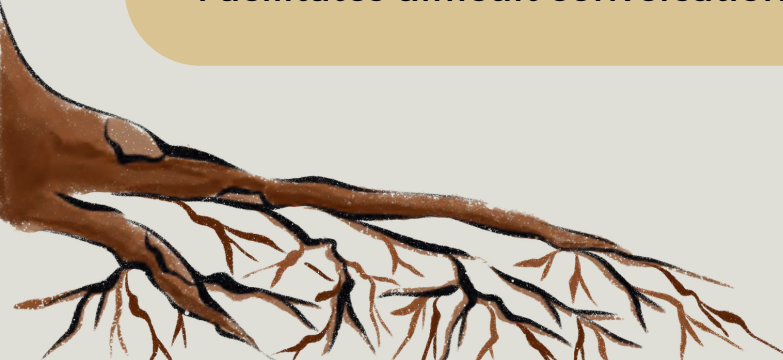
HCN's Afri-centric framework is presented below.



AFRI-CENTRICITY IN HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK'S PROGRAMMING & APPROACHES



- Affirms Blackness
 - Is trauma-informed
 - Is love-informed
 - Focuses on self-acceptance
 - Focuses on resilience
 - Identifies unique areas of strength
 - Normalizes clients' experiences
 - Reframes the stigma of mental health among the Black community
-
- Acknowledges a range of spiritual practices within the Black community
 - Encourages clients to believe in their capability and choice to engage in their own healing
 - Integrates family and community members into services
 - Offers space to process collective grief and fear without judgment
 - Addresses barriers to accessing resources and basic needs
 - Facilitates difficult conversations



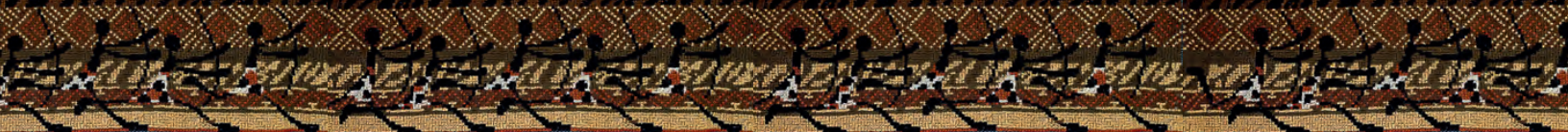
HCN'S MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth leadership development programs have been found to increase community engagement (Onyeka et al., 2022) and deepen connections with peers and commitment to social change (Monkman & Proweller, 2016) in Youth of Color. In recent years, youth leadership development programs geared toward Black youth have expanded to examine young people's racial and ethnic identity (Brittian Loyd & Williams, 2017), orient toward Afri-centric values (Grills et al., 2016), and acknowledge and address racism and other forms of trauma (Ortega-Williams & Harden, 2022). Such models have reported positive effects on racial and ethnic identity (Brittian Loyd & Williams, 2017). Studies of Afri-centric models have found increased prosocial behavior, more positive expectations for the future (Grills et al., 2016), increased community engagement, motivation, and engagement with social change (Lewis et al., 2006).

Underscoring the need to move beyond a more general model of youth development, other research has highlighted the importance of programs developed by Black adults to support Black youth, particularly Black women leaders mentoring Black girls (Cook, 2020). Few studies, however, have examined the perspectives of staff and youth involved in Black-led youth leadership development programs.

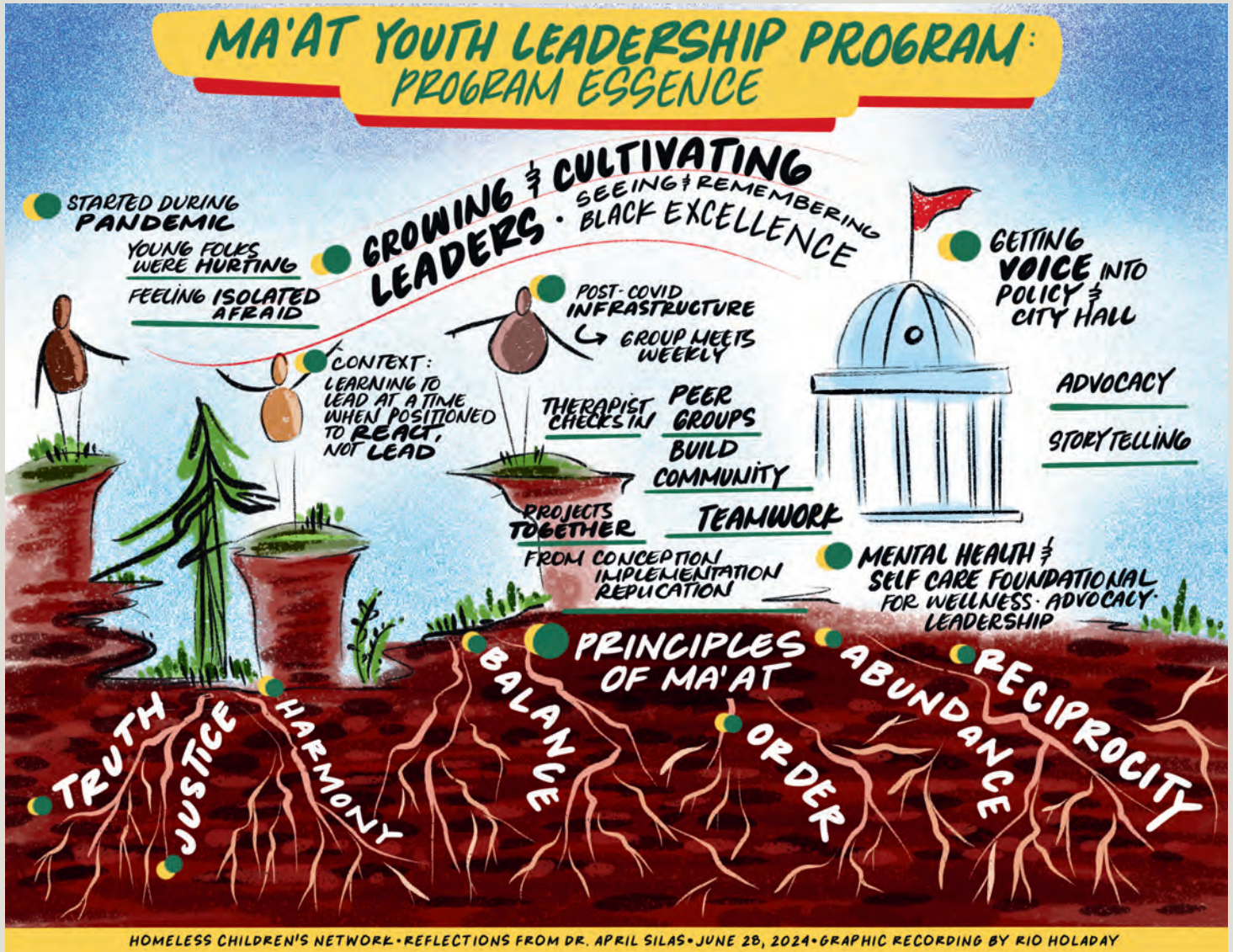




Afri-centric practices stand out for their attention to self-determination. A focus on African agency has been principle since ancient times, not just developing in response to colonization. Many scholars highlight the ancient principles of Ma'at when discussing agency and African culture. African people in ancient Egypt were called to be active participants in their lives, seeking self-empowerment and balance. In this pursuit many of them looked to the values of Ma'at for harmony, order, balance and justice (Pratt-Harris, 2013). This balance stands as a pillar of unity among African people, and one deemed particularly important for young people (Allen, 2008).

In HCN's Ma'at Youth Leadership program, this focus is geared towards middle adolescent youth (12-18 years old). African Americans should dictate how their communities are built and run, and this extends to the values they desire to pass along culturally-uninterrupted. Historically, African people have exhibited damaged self-concepts due to historic and current discrimination, and this has affected their communities in turn (Brown, Sellers, & Gomez, 2002). Because of this there is a strong need for a secure space to learn, move forward, and to catering to African people's unrecognized needs (Shockley, 2008).

Attention on youth development in Black centered programs today calls forward the need for agency (Swigonsky, 1996). Disrupting systems of privilege and allowing free mobility for Black youth begins shifting the paradigm. The principles of Ma'at encourage young people to take up roles that develop their leadership, teamwork and community habits (Informing Change, 2023). It aims to nurture the soul and put their spiritual essence forward (Gilbert, Harvey, & Belgrave, 2009). This reminds us that while gaining leadership skills are important, what matters even more as these middle adolescent youth transition into adulthood is their interpretation of 'reality' and their sense that they can, indeed, impact the world (Swigonsky, 1996).



MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Ma'at Youth Leadership (MYL) Program was developed by Homeless Children's Network to encourage leadership development among middle adolescent Black youth (ages of 12-18 years old) in the City of San Francisco. The program goals are to develop leadership and life skills by creating a culture of wellness and healing. Youth receive one-on-one support and virtual group meetings that focus on civic engagement and advocacy, leadership development, college readiness, and personal development. This program supports youth to address trauma, set and make plans towards achieving their own goals, and envision and advocate for a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

VALUES THAT INFORM THE MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Social connectedness through civic engagement

Communal approach to wellness and healing

Agency within community

The whole family and whole community involved with wellness of an individual

Self-determination

Ubuntu - I am, because we are





MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP EVALUATION

COMPONENTS OF THE 2023-2024

MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Twelve (12) Ma'at Youth Leaders attended weekly group meetings over an academic year (e.g., 8 months) and received one-on-one mentorship from the Program Coordinator, who also identifies as Black and grew up in San Francisco. During their weekly group meetings, they engaged in community events, workshops, and panels. The table below summarizes the activities in which the Ma'at Youth Leaders participated.

SUMMARY OF MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: 2023 - 2024

Setting personal and professional goals



Reflective 1:1 sessions with MYL Program Coordinator

Network of peers

Experiences with peer mentoring among the middle school and high school students

Guest speakers & Future careers panel




College preparation activities and skill building

-  Black Aviation Careers
-  Study Abroad

Civic and community engagement

-  Turkey Drive
-  HBCU College Expo
-  Black Student Union at Lowell
-  Juneteenth Parade
-  Community Clean up at Heron Head Park

Workshop facilitation

-  Self Care
-  Black Hair Care
-  History of Juneteenth



PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 Were Ma'at Youth Leadership program objectives met?
- 2 How do Ma'at Youth Leadership participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the Ma'at Youth Leadership program?
- 3 How does the Ma'at Youth Leadership team at HCN describe the conditions and approaches that enabled them to meet their objectives?

METHODOGOLOGY

PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

Since 2007, Indigo Cultural Center has built a strong reputation as a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) organization with partner-clients across the country; whereby evaluation design, implementation and dissemination activities are closely aligned with our partner's ongoing service delivery to establish and maintain continuous quality improvement.

HCN leadership and the Ma'at Youth Leadership team at HCN collaborated with us on the following phases of development: evaluation design, survey development, data collection outreach, and interpretation of findings.

PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation for the Ma'at Youth Leadership program had three phases.

Phase one involved reviewing the progress of program objectives and performance measures set by the funders and HCN leadership.

Phase two involved the distribution of a survey that included rating scales and open-ended questions.

Phase three involved the Ma'at Youth Leadership team's participation in a joint interview to explore the approach(es) and conditions necessary to make this program a success.

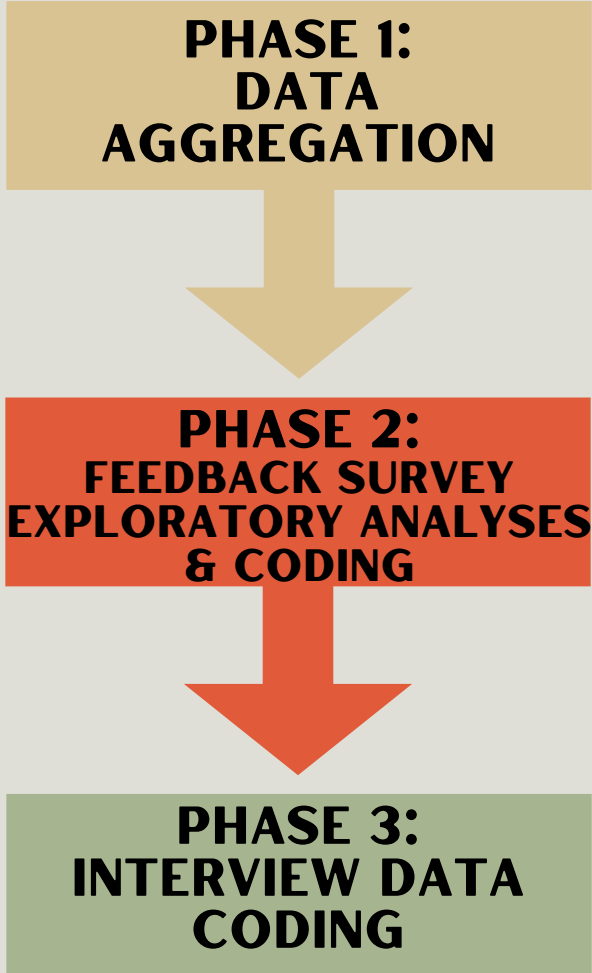
We relied heavily on the methodology of storytelling in the qualitative aspects of our data collection in Phase three. Inspired by the work of S.R. Tolliver (Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research, 2022), we were interested to uplift alternative ways of knowing that foregrounds Black narrative traditions.

Here at Indigo Cultural Center, we are also on our journey of decolonizing our ways of gathering data and conducting community evaluations by decentering more mainstream, white-centered qualitative methods.



FINDINGS

ANALYSIS APPROACH



PHASE ONE:
To track performance measures, we simply aggregated data points from HCN’s administrative database.

PHASE TWO:
To analyze the participant feedback survey, we conducted exploratory analyses on the rating scales. For the open-ended questions we coded those responses using a combination of a priori coding and emergent coding.

PHASE THREE:
To analyze interview data from HCN staff, we utilized two main types of coding the interview transcripts. The first was a priori coding, because some of our codes emerged based on the questions that came from our focus group script. The other type of coding process we used was emergent coding (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). Because our questions were broad and exploratory, we aimed to capture concepts, experiences, and meanings that surfaced from the words and stories in the transcripts. Emergent themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the worldviews of research participants themselves.

FINDINGS

RESEARCH QUESTION #1: WERE MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP'S PROGRAM OBJECTIVES MET?

Twelve (12) Ma'at Youth Leaders attended weekly group meetings and received one-on-one mentorship from the Program Coordinator, who also identifies as Black. During their weekly group meetings, they engaged in community and civic events, workshops, and panels. The table below summarizes the extent to which programmatic objectives and expectations (established by HCN leadership and funders) were met.

MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE MEASURES	GOAL/ACTUAL	COMPLETION %
 Youth Leaders enrolled in program	12/12	 100%
 Needs assessments conducted	12/12	 100%
 Short term goals identified	12/12	 100%
 Group meetings held	20/39	 152%
 Workplace skills trainings	8/11	 173%
 Life skills trainings	12/12	 100%
 Workshops/Trainings facilitated (by student leaders)	2/2	 100%
 Outreach events conducted	10/10	 100%
 Outreach materials distributed	75/75	 100%
 Staff trainings conducted	1/1	 100%
100% COMPLETION RATE		

FINDINGS

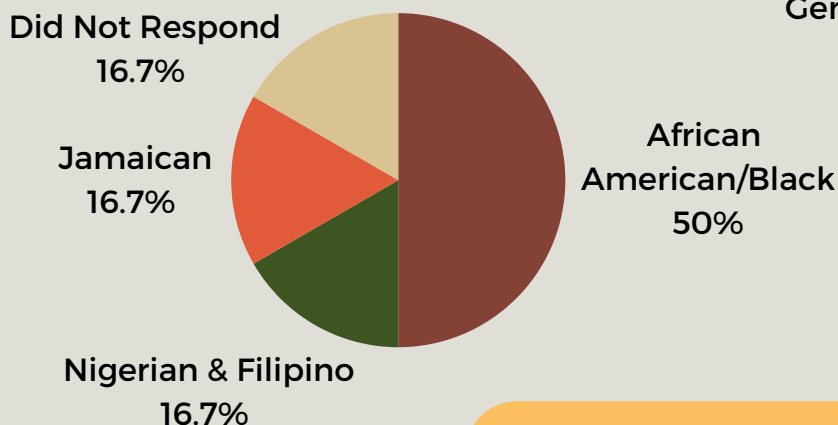


RESEARCH QUESTION #2: HOW DID MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM?

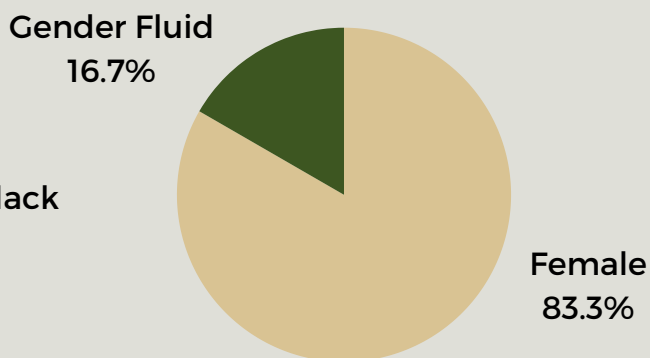
There were twelve (12) youth who participated in the Ma'at Youth Leadership Program; six youth leaders participated in the feedback evaluation. Evaluation participants were between 13 and 18 years old (Median age = 15.6), primarily identified as descendants from Africa (100%), and as female (83%). Two participants were in middle school and four participants in high school. The high school participants were all returning Ma'at Youth Leaders having been part of the program between 2-4 years.

The feedback survey focused on three key components and objectives of Ma'at Youth Leadership: **goal setting; skill building / professional development; and personal growth.**

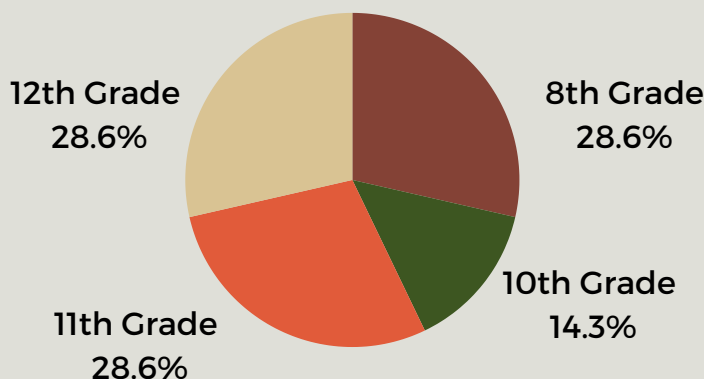
MYL PARTICIPANT
RACIAL IDENTITY



MYL PARTICIPANT
GENDER IDENTITY



MYL PARTICIPANT
GRADE LEVEL



FINDINGS



KEY COMPONENT OF MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP: GOAL SETTING

The Ma'at Youth Leadership program aims to teach young leaders how to set goals and achieve them. At the beginning of the program, leaders were asked to complete a holistic needs assessment where they identified short- and long-term goals. Students were asked to reflect on their personal development, professional development, mental health and well-being, and communication with family.

The TOP GOALS identified by leaders surveyed were:



Grades-focused

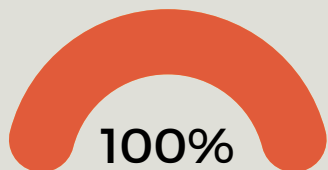


Time management-focused



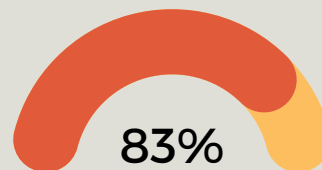
School-life balance-focused

As part of the feedback survey, leaders were asked about the program's role in helping them **identify** and **achieve** their goals:



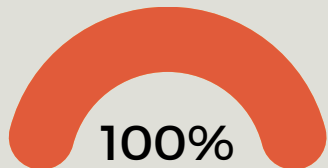
100%

Youth leaders agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them **identify** their goals.



83%

Youth leaders responded that the program helped them **establish a plan** to achieve their goals.



100%

Youth leaders felt that the program helped them **put their plan into action**, and they were able to **take steps towards** achieving their goals.



100%

Youth leaders surveyed strongly agreed that the program provided them with the **skills to identify** and make **plans** to achieve goals they identify moving forward.



FINDINGS



KEY COMPONENT OF MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP: GOAL SETTING CONTINUED...

The youth leaders were asked about what aspects of the program were **MOST HELPFUL** in helping them achieve their goal:



Youth leaders identified that **meeting one-on-one with the Program Coordinator** was essential in providing them with the perspectives and guidance to achieve their goals.

In addition, they felt that the motivation from **guest speakers** was helpful to them. **Having a mentor-figure** was essential in moving leaders towards their dreams.



“The 1:1 check-ins with [the coordinator] really helped me out with my time management goal. She asked about how I was able to work towards becoming better at managing my time and offered advice that could possibly help me improve my time management ...and having time to myself at the end of the day or on the weekends. [The coordinator] encouraged me to keep up what I was doing, and it boosted my confidence in pursuing the goal.”

~Ma'at Youth Leader

FINDINGS



KEY COMPONENT OF MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/SKILL BUILDING

The Ma'at Youth Leadership Program promotes the agency of youth and self-determination by developing an emergent curriculum based on the holistic needs assessment that was conducted at the start of the program. Program leadership provides youth leaders with the opportunity to learn new skills and perspectives through exposure to guest speakers, workshops, civic engagement, and community experiences guided by students' interests. The charts below depict the various skills and lessons the youth leaders learned through these various experiences and activities. **Public speaking** and **time management** were the top skills that participants listed in their evaluation responses.

SKILLS GAINED FROM PROGRAM WORKSHOPS	LESSONS LEARNED FROM GUEST SPEAKERS
Public speaking	Diversity of career paths and options for the future
Time management	The power of public speaking
Career readiness	Importance of leadership and advocacy
Financial literacy	Importance of time management
Taking care of mental health	Importance of good grades

“The workshops taught about advocacy in leadership settings... people presented how they got to where they were today by advocating for themselves and others. [Others] taught about... presenting skills [and] preparing early for presentations, using several sources for research, and practicing presenting points. [The presenters] really helped me think about what I can do in the future... I was inspired by the different workshops and presentations.”

~Ma'at Youth Leader



TOP SKILL GAINED BY PARTICIPANTS: PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Ma'at Youth Leadership Program emphasized the importance of public speaking throughout all program activities. During their time in the program, students were tasked with practicing these skills by providing workshops to community members focusing on the history of Juneteenth and Historically Black Colleges & Universities.

For several of the students, hosting these community workshops were among their first experiences engaging in public speaking. Leaders were asked about the program's impact on their public speaking abilities:



Youth leaders shared that they felt **more confident** in their public speaking skills when it involved speaking in front of others, sharing their ideas, and asking questions.



Youth leaders expressed that the program helped them feel more confidence in **what they can achieve** from their public speaking.



KEY COMPONENT OF MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP: PERSONAL GROWTH

During middle adolescence (approximately 13–18 years old – same ages as MYL participants), young people develop the capacity for ‘transcendent’ thinking. By this age, youth are able to and are interested in expanding the way they see their day-to-day world by integrating abstract, macro-level factors that impact their own and their community’s lives (Gotlieb, Yang, & Immordino-Yang, 2024). Gotlieb and colleagues explain transcendent thinking in this way, “[middle adolescents] invoke broader perspectives on themselves, other people, and social systems, and draw on cultural values and associated emotions to infer social and ethical implications and build deeper understandings.”

HCN’s Ma’at Youth Leadership program engages young people in transcendent thinking at every step of the weekly program: the holistic needs assessment; 1:1 reflective sessions; attending workshops; peer networking; mentoring middle schoolers; listening to career panels; facilitating workshops; and civic and community engagement.

The ability to engage in transcendent thinking can impact outcomes later in life such as positive intersectional identity development and an emerging sense of self that is explicitly rooted in reflections on experiences (such as those in the MYL program), hopes, relationships, Afri-centric values, and beliefs about community. This type of identity development process that is rooted in Afri-centric values like self-determination and community interconnectedness can support Ma’at Youth Leadership participants’ healthy transition to young adulthood.

In fact, recent longitudinal studies have found that middle adolescents who have developed their transcendent thinking capacity are more likely to experience positive identity, healthy relationships, “a positive sense of self and life purpose, and productive, ethical use of educational and work opportunities” later on in adulthood (Gotlieb et al., 2014). The reflective responses received from participants in HCN’s Ma’at Youth Leadership program reflect some of the themes from these longitudinal findings.



FINDINGS



KEY COMPONENT OF MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP: PERSONAL GROWTH

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THE MOST GROWTH? (TOP THEMES)



Learning about Black culture and self-love



Learning how to turn weaknesses into strengths and focus on the things that help me grow.



Feeling supported and understood by my peers and [MYL Coordinator]



Advocacy in leadership settings



Exposure to careers and professional fields I wouldn't have known about or wouldn't have had the confidence to pursue.



Finances and financial planning



"[The MYL Coordinator] encouraged me to keep up what I was doing, and it boosted my confidence in pursuing the goal."

~Ma'at Youth Leader



"I learned how to ask teachers for help and advocate for myself and others in leadership spaces. Other times, it was letting others do their tasks and go with the outcome when things get tough."

~Ma'at Youth Leader





“Before joining the program, I didn’t have a real idea of what mentorship was. I thought that it was just an older person telling their pupil/younger student what to do and that was it. When I joined this program and through the check-ins, I learned more about what mentorship was. Mentorship is about guidance and advice inside and outside the program.”

~Ma’at Youth Leader

HIGHLIGHTED PERSONAL GROWTH IMPACT: HIGH SCHOOL MENTORSHIP

This year’s program was a bit different from previous years’ programming in that it provided the high school youth leaders with a unique opportunity to directly mentor their middle school peers. Specifically, high school leaders were tasked with the goal of helping their peers learn about and prepare to enter high school through group presentations and one-on-one mentorship. Four of the leaders surveyed were in high school, and each of them had more than a year of experience participating in the Ma’at Youth Leadership Program.

Mentoring their peers provided high schoolers with a different perspective on their role as leaders outside of the regular program activities.

Youth leaders expressed that they **enjoyed** helping their younger peers learn about high school and felt that they had a positive impact on their middle school peers.

Youth leaders expressed that it was **important to them** that they are a good mentor to their peers.

Youth leaders felt that the program helped them learn **how to be a good mentor** to others.

Youth leaders recognized that they **are** in fact good mentors.

FINDINGS

This experience set the stage for high school leaders to continue serving as mentors to others.



Youth leaders expressed that they would like to **continue** being a mentor or role model to others in the future.

RESEARCH QUESTION #3: WHAT DID IT TAKE TO MEET AND EXCEED PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND IMPACT PARTICIPANTS' OUTCOMES?

The Ma'at Youth Leadership Program met and exceeded all their expected outcomes and objectives. This achievement can be attributed to the **relationships and trust** established between the Program Coordinator and program participants.

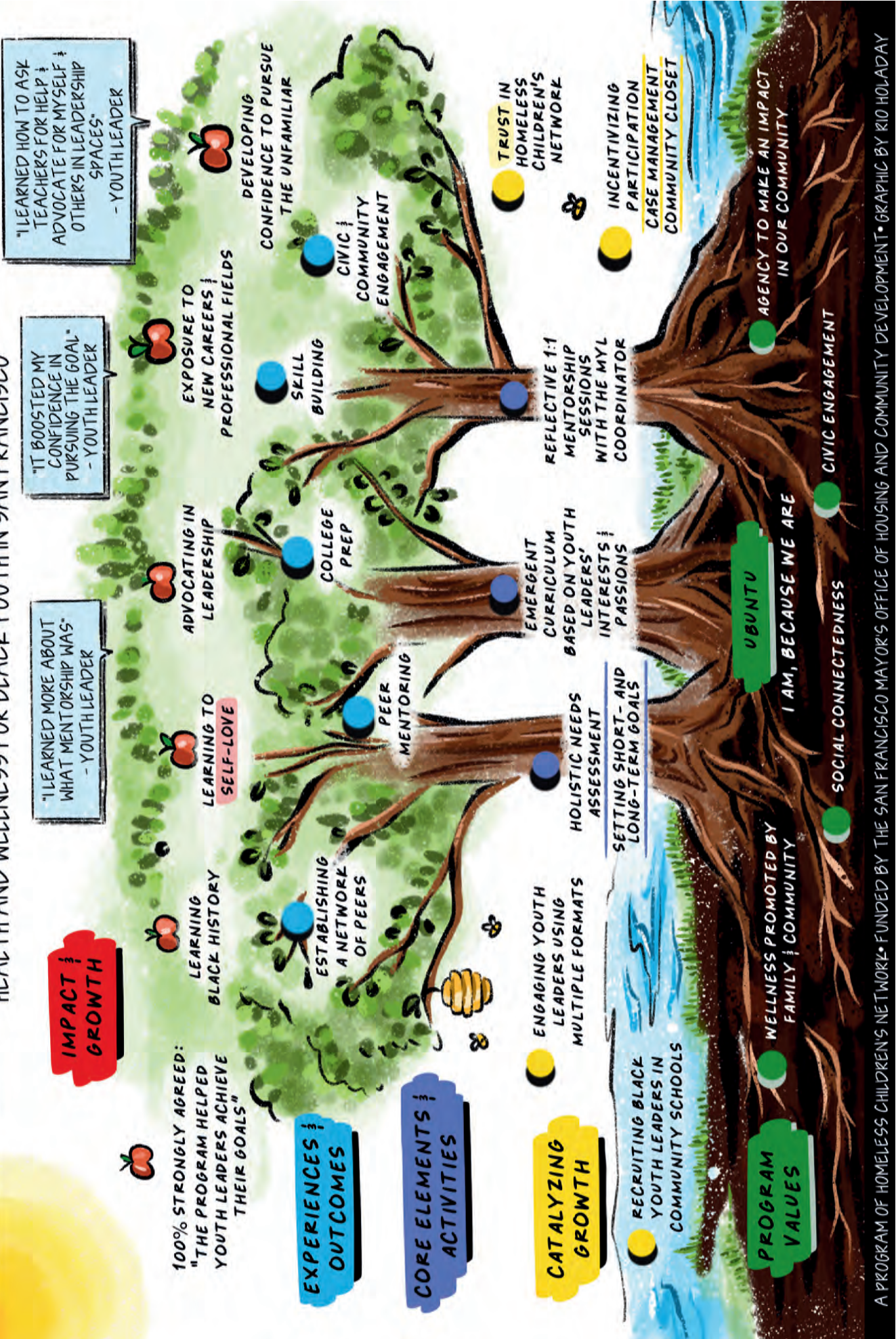
This program's curriculum was intentionally designed to be **emergent**. That is, program activities were directly informed by students' needs and interests which were expressed during the Needs Assessment Surveys conducted at the beginning of the program, as well as ongoing feedback throughout the program. Utilizing what is learned from the youth leaders' needs assessment surveys, the Ma'at Youth Leadership team sought out guest speakers and activities which would reflect the young people's goals, interests, and desired outcomes from participation in the program.

Youth leaders were also provided with a **support system** through one-on-one meetings with the Program Coordinator and amongst their peers. In addition to receiving this mentorship and support, the leaders were provided with **monthly stipends to encourage regular attendance**.

The graphic below depicts the catalysts for success that aligned with many of the values promoted in the Ma'at Youth Leadership program.

MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM TO PROMOTE LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOR BLACK YOUTH IN SAN FRANCISCO





DISCUSSION

The Ma'at Youth Leadership (MYL) Program was developed by the Homeless Children's Network to encourage leadership development among middle adolescent Black youth (ages of 12-18 years old) in the City of San Francisco. The program goals are to develop leadership and life skills by creating a culture of wellness and healing. Youth receive one-on-one support and virtual group meetings that focus on civic engagement and advocacy, leadership development, college readiness, and personal development. This program supports youth to address trauma, set and make plans towards achieving their own goals, and envision and advocate for a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

The Ma'at Youth Leadership program provided twelve (12) student leaders with mentorship essential to their development and perspective towards setting and achieving goals. 100% of the program's service goals were met and even exceeded in regards to the total number of 'group meetings' held and the total number of 'workplace skills trainings' attended. Youth leaders' agency and self-determination was bolstered by program activities, guest speakers, civic and community engagement experiences, and support from one-on-one mentorship sessions with the Program Coordinator. Through these aspects of the program, the youth leaders were able to gain skills such as confidence in their public speaking capabilities, time management, self-care, goal setting and achievement, and advocacy in leadership settings. Overall, student leaders were inspired and provided with the tools necessary to dream about their future and the endless possibilities they could aspire for.



IMPLICATIONS

There are many implications that can be drawn from the findings shared in this evaluation report. We highlight three implications below.

Practice Implication

HCN's Ma'at Youth Leadership program provides meaningful opportunities for middle adolescents to engage in transcendent thinking and expand the way they see their day-to-day world by integrating abstract, macro-level factors that impact their own and their community's lives. These skills and aptitude will impact their ongoing development, self-determination, well-being, and transition into adulthood. An important strategy to leverage and amplify the impact of this program is to continue to encourage students to return for more than one year.

Findings from this evaluation reveal that those who return for multiple years come back because they 'just really enjoy the program.' The Ma'at Youth Leadership team at HCN has made it easy and accessible for students to attend and encouraging student leaders to return for additional years could lead to enhanced outcomes such as positive effects on racial and ethnic identity; increased prosocial behavior; more positive expectations for the future; increased community engagement, motivation, and engagement with social change (Brittian Loyd & Williams, 2017; Grills et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2006).

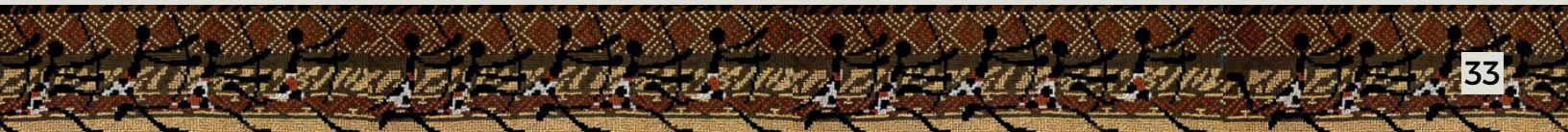
Research Implication

Future studies should examine the long-term impacts of participating in Ma'at Youth Leadership on middle adolescents.

Key questions to explore include: What are the impacts on longer-term outcomes such as those listed above? What are the longer-term impacts on participating in advocacy, organizing and leadership roles on behalf of the Black community?

Community Implication

Findings from this evaluation and the evaluations of HCN's Ma'at Youth Leadership program from previous years underscored the importance of investing in the provision of opportunities for young, Black middle adolescents to develop leadership skills in fostering hope and dreams for the future, and to build their confidence to continue to achieve. These student leaders are our future leaders of San Francisco and beyond. Additional implications for the Black San Francisco community include elevating the importance of mentorship for Black youth. For example, future efforts of the Ma'at Youth Leadership program can continue to leverage HCN's connections with key leaders in the Black community who are members of MegaBlack, Dream Keeper Initiative, and beyond.



CLOSING INSPIRATION

“We desire to bequest two things to the children and youth. The first one is roots; the other is wings.”

~ Sudanese Proverb



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