



2020 NATIONAL OUTCOMES REPORT

# Measuring the Impact of Boys & Girls Clubs



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS  
OF AMERICA**

**NYOI**  
National Youth Outcomes Initiative

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
The Boys & Girls Club Approach to Positive Youth Development	6
Importance of a High-Quality Club Experience	8
Club Creates a Home Away from Home With Youth	11
<b>CLUB MEMBERS ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>DEVELOPING GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE GRADUATES</b>	<b>15</b>
Promoting High School Graduation	15
Engaging Black, Latino and Female Youth in STEM	18
Preparing Youth for Postsecondary Education	20
Priming Youth for Success in the Modern Workforce	23
Club Goes Full STEAM Ahead to Help Youth Prepare for Career Success	26
<b>DEVELOPING 21ST CENTURY LEADERS</b>	<b>28</b>
Laying a Critical Character Development Foundation	28
Building Leadership Skills at the Club	29
Club Youth Lead and Make Change	31
Club Builds Leaders and Change Agents – One Day, One Youth at a Time	32
<b>DEVELOPING A HEALTHIER GENERATION</b>	<b>34</b>
Promoting Physical Activity and Wellness	34
Club Provides Year-Round Sports and Fitness Opportunities for Youth	38
Preventing Substance Use	39
Building Emotional Wellness	43
Club’s Social-Emotional Programs Treat Trauma of Opioid Epidemic	46
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>48</b>
About Boys & Girls Clubs of America	50
Endnotes	51



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# Measuring the Impact of Boys & Girls Clubs

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) is committed to measuring how much our young people are achieving and how effectively our Club Experience is implemented. Our outcome measurement strategies are designed to support Boys & Girls Clubs in delivering high-quality programming and services, implementing continuous quality improvement processes, and demonstrating their positive impact to stakeholders. BGCA is proud to present this report summarizing our 2020 national youth outcomes findings.





# Introduction

Over the past two decades, BGCA has worked with Club organizations to build their capacity to collect and use data to measure youth outcomes and demonstrate their impact to stakeholders. This data also enables Clubs to adjust their programming and practices and implement quality improvements to have a greater beneficial effect on young people.

In 2010, as part of long-range strategic planning for Boys & Girls Clubs collectively, Club leaders from across the nation worked together to articulate a new theory of change, called Formula for Impact. Based on external and internal youth development research and more than a century of Boys & Girls Clubs' own practices and experience, the Formula for Impact described how Clubs put our youth development mission in action.<sup>1,2</sup>

As stated in our mission statement, Boys & Girls Clubs:

**Enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.**

The Formula for Impact articulated who Clubs served, how they served, and the educational, character development and health outcomes they hoped young people would achieve as a result of participating in a Club.

In 2011, BGCA launched the National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI), a system grounded in the Formula for Impact and built to measure the impact of Clubs using a common set of research-informed indicators of outcomes in the three priority areas.

Over the past decade, BGCA and Clubs have continued to respond to the ever-changing societal landscape in which young people are growing up. They have learned from the best new research and practice insights in the youth development, education and other related human services fields. As a result, BGCA has evolved and built upon the Formula for Impact to create a much stronger, more nuanced Boys & Girls Club approach to positive youth development.

In keeping with this evolution, BGCA also works to enhance the NYOI system as needed, providing training, resources and technical assistance to enable local Club organizations to use their data more effectively.

## **More About the National Youth Outcomes Initiative**

In NYOI, Clubs collect data about their registered members' demographics, attendance and participation. Local systems feed data into the national system, allowing BGCA to compile data on the overall population served by Clubs.

NYOI features many tools for Clubs, but the principal tool for gathering outcomes data is a survey administered to members each spring. The NYOI Member Survey asks young people about their perceptions of the Club. Their responses allow BGCA to assess how well Clubs deliver a high-quality Club Experience that promotes positive youth development. The survey also measures indicators of youth achievement in BGCA's priority outcome areas. Some survey questions are asked of members of all ages, while others are only asked of teens ages 13 to 18.

BGCA processes Club member survey responses, furnishes each participating Club organization with its members' survey data, then aggregates and analyzes the data to render national results. In spring 2019, over 200,000 Club members completed the survey in more than 3,300 sites

By contrast, in spring 2020, over 70,000 Club members completed the survey in more than 1,660 Club sites. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all Clubs were forced to close in March and April, significantly disrupting NYOI Member Survey administration. Although the 2020 survey sample is smaller than in the past, its size is still more than ample and well represents the national network of Boys & Girls Clubs and the youth and communities they serve.

# The Boys & Girls Club Approach to Positive Youth Development

BGCA and Clubs believe that all young people deserve to thrive. BGCA imagines a world where the determinants necessary to thrive are fully accessible to every youth in America. Thriving reflects a significant sense of growth or success in and across many domains. Young people with access to more quality opportunities are more likely to thrive than their peers with similar adaptive skills.<sup>3</sup>

BGCA's approach to positive youth development, therefore, reflects the knowledge, anchored in extensive research, that a quality after-school environment can support the social, emotional, physical and cognitive<sup>4</sup> needs of young people in important ways. Whether through a virtual or in-person Club setting, youth are able to learn and grow and ultimately become ready for life and work.

Boys & Girls Clubs support young people's development through these vehicles:

- ◆ **Environments** that are safe, positive and inclusive.
- ◆ **Relationships** in which youth forge supportive, meaningful and healthy connections with adults and peers.
- ◆ **Experiences** that build upon their strengths, foster a sense of belonging and purpose, and provide opportunities to lead and be heard.<sup>5</sup>



Club professionals' practices for ensuring safety, well-being, equity and inclusion are essential for creating a youth-centered Club Experience. In addition, as research by the Search Institute has clearly documented, "developmental relationships ... enable young people to discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them."<sup>6</sup> Built on a firm foundation of physical and emotional safety, the environments, relationships and experiences young people find in the Club help them achieve positive outcomes in the priority areas of Academic Success, Character and Leadership, and Healthy Lifestyles.

## Club Guiding Principles for Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is an intentional, pro-social approach that places youth at the center of their own learning, helping them to build and apply the skills needed for positive cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.<sup>7</sup> This understanding of positive youth development forms the underpinning for three guiding principles that Clubs use to build a high-quality, outcome-driven Club experience:

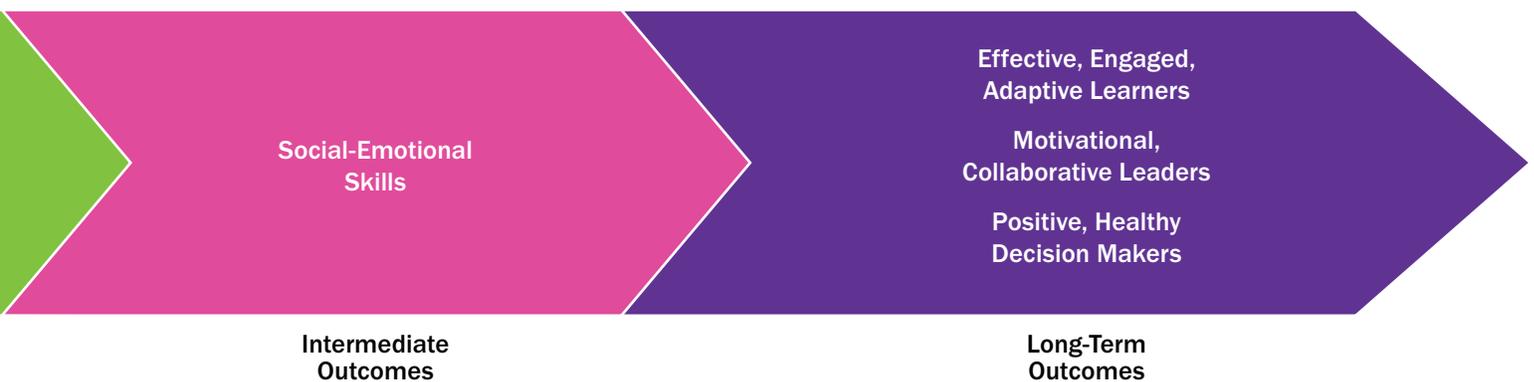
- ◆ **Whole-Child Development:** Club professionals understand that all of a young person’s areas of development work together.<sup>8</sup> Staff must attend to all of them holistically and simultaneously, as they are interconnected. Clubs are set up to reflect and address this interdependence.
- ◆ **Developmentally Appropriate Experiences:** Clubs utilize programming and delivery methods that are suitable for and match the physical, emotional, social and cognitive characteristics of the age groups participating. Reaching life milestones in each area of development is encouraged, recognized and celebrated.
- ◆ **Program Quality:** Clubs engage in continuous quality improvement processes to understand youth needs, ensure staff have the capacity to implement high-quality practices that support youth needs, and make ongoing improvements to the Club Experience. In such a quality program context, a robust culture of learning and improvement supports a youth-centered environment.<sup>9</sup>

When a high-quality Club Experience is characterized by a safe, inclusive environment, supportive relationships with adults and peers, and enriching experiences rife with opportunities to build skills, exploration and learning are bound to happen. Because learning is social and

emotional,<sup>10</sup> the Club day offers many moments to practice skills such as teamwork, communication and perseverance. Club professionals integrate certain practices in their interactions with young people to optimize these informal and formal social-emotional skill-building moments.

“ Club professionals’ practices for ensuring safety, well-being, equity and inclusion are essential for creating a youth-centered Club Experience.

As youth develop social-emotional skills in the Club, this facilitates their ability to develop other skills, such as inquiry, analysis and investigation, through specific programs and activities. By practicing their social-emotional skills over time with nurturing adults, young people become better able to use those skills to build other important knowledge and skills related to long-term outcomes in the priority areas of Academic Success, Character and Leadership, and Healthy Lifestyles.



# Importance of a High-Quality Club Experience

## A High-Quality Club Experience Supports Social-Emotional Development

Since NYOI's inception, BGCA has used the data to examine the relationship between members' Club Experience and the outcomes they achieve. BGCA can determine the effects of the Club Experience on various youth outcomes by comparing Club members who report an optimal Club Experience to Club members who report a Club Experience that needs improvement.<sup>11</sup>

social-emotional skills when compared to their peers who report their Club Experience needs improvement.



## A High-Quality Club Experience Also Drives Long-Term Outcomes

BGCA also has found consistently that when members report having an optimal Club Experience, they are more likely to achieve positive outcomes in the priority areas of Academic Success, Character and Leadership, and Healthy Lifestyles. For example, members who report an optimal Club Experience are 32% less likely to consume alcohol or tobacco compared to their Club peers who report a Club Experience that needs improvement. Continued exposure to a high-quality Club Experience fosters a love for learning, enabling young people to grow into effective, engaged and adaptive learners. It builds young people's confidence and competence to motivate, collaborate and lead. And it equips young people with the ability to live as positive, healthy decision makers. As presented throughout this report, NYOI data shows that as young people develop various social-emotional skills, those, too, help to drive and reinforce these longer-term outcomes.



On average, members who report an optimal Club Experience are almost twice as likely to report strong

Members who report an optimal Club Experience are more likely to report positive outcomes in each of the three priority areas. They are:

### Academic Success



**35%**

More likely to be on track to graduate on time (high school)

**44%**

More likely to believe that school work is meaningful

**25%**

Less likely to skip school

### Character and Leadership



**49%**

More likely to volunteer on a monthly basis (teens)

**36%**

Less likely to get into a physical fight

### Healthy Lifestyles



**32%**

Less likely to consume alcohol or tobacco

**18%**

More likely to be physically active five or more days per week

Clubs that provide a high-quality, outcome-driven Club Experience support young people in reaching their full potential and building knowledge, skills and habits that they can transfer beyond the Club walls.

“ With a keen focus on digital equity, Clubs work to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to build critical digital literacy skills.

### **Leveraging Technology to Expand Club Reach and Impact**

The digital world is omnipresent in young people's lives, their education and the labor market they will enter. BGCA's digital strategy aims to ensure all young people can access and enjoy change-making digital opportunities and experiences at Clubs and beyond, and that its internal systems can evolve rapidly to meet the ever-changing demand.

With a keen focus on digital equity, Clubs work to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to build critical digital literacy skills such as online safety, digital etiquette, collaboration and technical know-how. BGCA and Clubs also establish key partnerships to ensure that young people have access to the technology they need in the Club and at home to thrive in this digital age.

Young people need and enjoy high-quality digital experiences. In 2017, BGCA launched the ever-growing MyFuture platform. Members can access this fun digital platform at the Club or at home to learn, play and socialize while participating in hundreds of self-directed activities spanning all three priority outcome areas.

On MyFuture, members can interact with each other, free from the danger of cyberbullying, and share their accomplishments locally and nationally.



By also building virtual Club Experiences at a national and local level, young people have access to high-quality youth development and environments, regardless of where they may be or what may be going on in the world. Clubs are no longer constrained to four walls. Whether it is a self-directed learning activity through MyFuture; a leadership Club video meeting; a staff-facilitated financial literacy workshop; or a live-streamed, youth-led panel on racial justice; the virtual Club provides high-quality experiences and programs at a distance.



“ Our foundation starts with our members feeling safe. If we can change their lives in the Club, it will ripple out and change the community. – Ricquel Archer, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tarrant County



### **Club Creates a Home Away From Home With Youth**

At the Eastside Branch of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tarrant County, Director Ricquel Archer understands the importance of creating a community. “Our Club has a home vibe because we are a big family here.”

At this Club, located in the last historically black community in Fort Worth, Texas, young people come together for a Club-wide assembly every day.

Kids are placed into teams by grade level, such as the 1st Grade Alligators and 3rd Grade Cheetahs, and come up with their own team chant. Teams earn points for team spirit, their participation in competitions like races or trivia, and listening closely during announcements like the daily Safety Tip. “They love assembly so much. These meetings have become the foundation of our culture because they create a strong house,” said Archer.

That culture carries through the Club day. Young people at the Eastside Branch have a lot of input into the programming that is offered. “During assembly we sometimes have things they can vote on. Sometimes it is silly, like which staff do you want to pie, but they also vote on what programs they want,” said Archer. The Club has implemented programs such as a STEM Week in the education room and an in-Club internship for teens based on youth voting and feedback sessions. “We’ve created an environment where we have a chance to hear from them directly, paying attention to what they enjoy, and asking questions like, ‘What did you like about this activity?’”

Youth voice is also prominent in Eastside’s character and leadership programming. Staff facilitate the SMART Girls program for girls ages 8 to 18, which sees high participation and offers a variety of activities. For young men, Barber Shop Talk has become a powerful experience. Barbers from the community, guest speakers like school principals and members of the Fort Worth police department, and male Club staff meet with young men in the Club to talk about “hot topics” and create emotional connections through mentoring.

Youth who have come through the program found these relationships so impactful that they started their own peer mentoring program for younger boys. On Wednesdays, instead of basketball practice, mentors and mentees meet to talk, giving the peer mentors a chance to practice leadership and help others going through similar life situations.

Eastside's focus on community, youth voice and mentorship have led to what Archer called a "culture shift." Shortly after an organizational merger, the Eastside Branch experienced an influx of new youth who initially struggled to adjust to their new branch, and for it to feel like "home." They were brought into the mentoring program to help them to integrate into their new Club community. "When some of the kids would get upset or melt down, their mentors were the ones who would pull them aside, check in with them, and create that sense of accountability and emotional safety."

"We can't control what happens outside of these doors, or what happens at home or at school, but we can control the environment here in the Club. We want youth to know that we can't wait for them to get here every day. This is a caring, consistent place," said Archer. At Eastside, all young people who attend are part of the Club family.

### **Facing Down a Pandemic: Clubs Adapt to Meet Community Needs**

In times of adversity, Clubs are part of the community response. For 160 years, Boys & Girls Clubs have navigated times of tragedy and crisis to provide safe places for kids and teens.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing gaps in opportunity, with potentially long-term impacts on children and teens. This was especially true for communities grappling with systemic inequities, despite their strengths and resilience. From nutrition and learning loss, to safety and emotional well-being, the pandemic disrupted young people's development and well-being.<sup>12</sup>

The pandemic called on Clubs to yet again rise to the challenge around the country. Beginning in March 2020, most Clubs ceased offering traditional after-school programming. Clubs used this major disruption as an opportunity to reimagine and expand the ways in which they meet the needs of their youth, families and communities. They collectively pivoted, adapted and innovated.

Within a week of closures, Clubs started to offer a range of modified services intended to ensure that their members (and others) remained connected, safe and engaged. From spring to early fall:



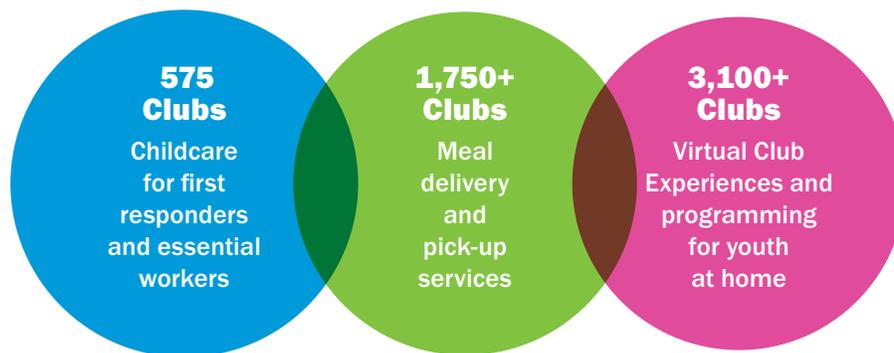
- ◆ **575 Clubs provided in-person childcare and youth development programming for children of first responders and essential workers.** These youth took part in fun learning and enrichment activities, as well as service-learning efforts that included crafting face masks, writing letters to front-line workers and seniors, and assembling care packages. Experiencing a sense of purpose and agency is especially important during difficult times.
- ◆ **More than 1,750 Clubs offered meal services through delivery and pick-up to help address growing levels of food insecurity,** especially among families who experienced lost and reduced income. Clubs partnered and coordinated with local schools, pantries and governments to secure resources and set up distribution processes. Clubs often provided activity packets alongside meals to support children’s learning and provide families with fun ways to engage and connect.
- ◆ **Over 3,100 Clubs delivered virtual Club Experiences and programming for youth at home.** Clubs used all the technology tools at their disposal and quickly mastered new ones.

Through video postings, social media streams and live online meetings, they sought to maintain continuity and connection. Thousands of young people took part in virtual read-alongs and STEM activities; virtual field trips and cooking lessons; dance battles, trivia contests and hang-outs; pop culture and social issues discussions; and adult- and youth-led panels on financial planning, career exploration, empowerment and racial justice. Clubs creatively celebrated young people’s milestones and accomplishments, especially for teens graduating from high school.

- ◆ **As schools started a new term in the fall, some 1,000 Clubs opened as virtual learning centers,** spaces in which young people participated in school online in a safe, conducive, supportive environment.

At the time of this report’s publication, no one knows what the future holds for this country regarding the pandemic. What is known, however, is that Boys & Girls Clubs will continue to rise to the challenge and innovate to ensure no young people are left behind.

Clubs rose to the challenge to meet the needs of youth and families.





# **Club Members Achieve Positive Outcomes**



# Developing Globally Competitive Graduates

When young people are academically successful, they graduate from high school on time, are motivated to learn, and have a plan to succeed in today's modern workforce. Clubs develop globally competitive graduates through programs, practices and experiences that enable youth to:

- ◆ **Build Foundational Social-Emotional Skills** – Youth practice and build social-emotional skills through participation in Club programming and interactions with caring adult staff. Essential skills include problem-solving, perseverance and key workforce skills.
- ◆ **Become Effective, Engaged Learners** – Youth love learning and are motivated to ask questions and connect previous experiences to learn from their successes and mistakes. Learning happens while building a robot and tinkering with it until it works, trying to solve a homework problem, or staying focused in order to graduate.
- ◆ **Develop a Postsecondary Plan** – Youth explore careers and link their experiences and interests to potential careers. They are exposed to employers in their fields of interest, obtain internships, and participate in programming that helps them visualize their goals and how to achieve them.

## Promoting High School Graduation

### THE BENEFITS OF AND BARRIERS TO GRADUATION

Youth who graduate from high school are more likely to achieve better financial, social and health outcomes.<sup>13</sup> A high school diploma is an indicator that a young person is ready for their next step in life, whether that is the

workforce, military service or a postsecondary education. High school graduates have increased employment opportunities and higher lifelong earnings compared to those without a diploma. Their families and their communities are better off for their individual success.<sup>14</sup>

Certain key risk factors can contribute to high school students' failure to graduate, including inconsistent school attendance, unsatisfactory behavior or suspension, or failure to pass math or English classes.

Additionally, beyond the classroom, significant environmental factors affect the academic success of young people, with the most influential being socioeconomic status.<sup>15</sup> Youth experiencing poverty, more than 50% of the U.S. public-school student population,<sup>16</sup> are at a greater risk of not graduating from high school on time compared to their peers who are not experiencing poverty. The national graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students is 80%, while the overall national graduation rate is 85%.<sup>17</sup> Why does poverty have this effect? Partially because the education students in low-income communities receive is inequitable compared to that of students in more affluent communities with well-funded, fully resourced schools. Schools serving low-income communities often have less experienced faculty, spend less per student on resources, and offer fewer advanced classes.<sup>18</sup>

### CLUBS PROVIDE YOUTH WITH ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT AND SUPPORT

Clubs support the academic success of youth by encouraging them to pursue their passions and interests. Clubs encourage kids to fall in love with learning through activities such as building a bridge with LEGO pieces or developing a computer program. Young people apply



problem-solving and perseverance skills as they learn from the process, with their curiosity driving them to succeed.

Almost 3,000 Clubs implement Project Learn, an approach that leverages Club programming, staff practices, environment, and partnerships to reinforce what youth learn during the school day while creating experiences that spark inspiration and discovery. Youth choose to engage with staff and the informal learning opportunities available every day throughout their Club. Youth receive daily homework help and targeted tutoring if needed. They build academic skills by participating in fun activities such as word games with friends, group engineering projects or gamesroom competitions. Club staff use incentives and recognition to encourage and celebrate young people’s academic efforts and achievements. Clubs collaborate with families, school personnel and other partners to support the education of youth. This approach has been found to be effective. A third-party evaluation showed that Project Learn participants had significantly better academic outcomes than Club youth who did not participate in Project Learn and non-Club youth.<sup>19</sup>

“ 75% of Club members ages 12 to 17 from low-income families report receiving mostly As and Bs, compared to 67% of their peers nationally.

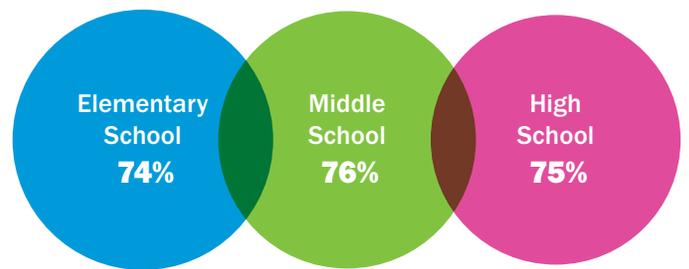
### MAJORITY OF CLUB MEMBERS ARE ON TRACK TO GRADUATE ON TIME

BGCA places a high priority on ensuring Club members are on track to graduate from high school on time. Based on existing research and data on the key predictors of

graduation, BGCA developed an on-track-to-graduate measure made up of several NYOI education-related indicators. A young person is considered to be on track to graduate on time when they: 1) report grades of mostly As and Bs, 2) do not skip school, 3) expect to graduate from high school, and 4) progress to the next grade level in school within at least a year of the expected timing.

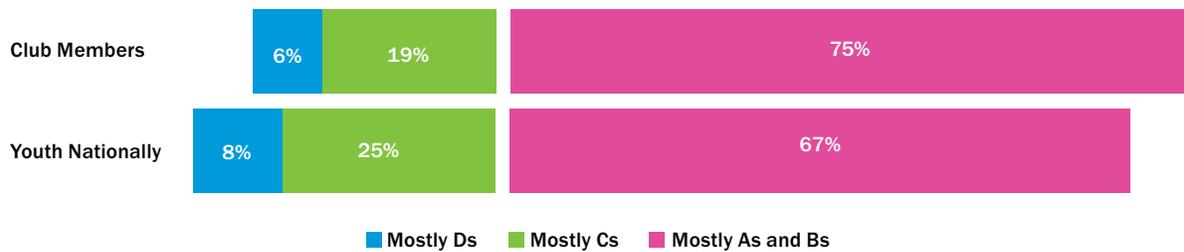
Overall, just over three-quarters of Club members (76%) are on track to graduate on time. This percentage remains relatively steady across grade levels.

Three-quarters of Club members are on track to graduate from high school on time.



### Club members report higher grades than youth nationally.

Among low-income youth ages 12 to 17

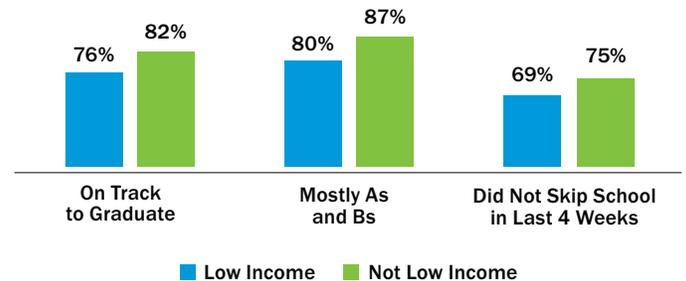


Clubs provide learning opportunities that can help address the academic inequities that exist among youth from families with a low income. A comparison of 2020 NYOI data on school grades to similar data from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (the most current data available from that source) shows that 75% of Club members ages 12 to 17 from low-income families report receiving mostly As and Bs, compared to 67% of their peers nationally.<sup>20</sup>

While this finding is encouraging, Clubs and BGCA must continue to find more ways to help combat educational inequities caused by poverty. Both Clubs and BGCA can more deeply analyze the yearly NYOI data to gauge members' progress on the on-track-to-graduate indicators by socioeconomic status and other important demographic variables. That data can then be used to adapt existing strategies or adopt new strategies for programming and partnerships. The 2020 NYOI data shows that Club members whose families have a low income fall behind on three of the on-track-to-graduate indicators when compared to Club members whose families do not have a low income.

This comparison highlights the persistent negative impact of poverty and challenges Clubs and BGCA to address educational equity by ensuring that all Club youth have the supports and resources they need to graduate on time.

### Club members from low-income families are less likely to be on track to graduate on time.

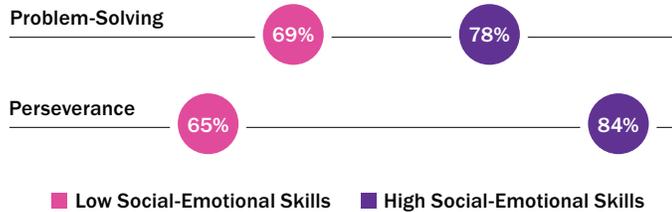


Club academic enrichment and support programming also provides many opportunities for young people to develop foundational social-emotional skills. When youth practice and strengthen their social-emotional skills in the Club learning environment, this helps them stay on track to graduate from high school on time (see graph on next page). NYOI data shows that Club members with strong problem-solving skills are more likely to be on track to graduate compared to Club members with low problem-solving skills (78% vs. 69%). The difference is even more marked for Club members with strong perseverance skills compared to Club members with low perseverance skills (84% vs. 65%).



### Perseverance and problem-solving help Club members stay on track to graduate.

% on track to graduate on time



## Engaging Black, Latino and Female Youth in STEM

### THE STEM WORKFORCE LACKS DIVERSITY

The fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) have an impact on every aspect of life, from how people communicate to the food they eat. STEM fosters technological innovation and scientific discoveries that connect people and help solve problems. STEM is also important for sustaining a stable and competitive economy, as innovation drives economic growth and raises wages.<sup>21</sup>

The STEM fields have long been plagued by a lack of diversity, with women, Black people and Latino people severely underrepresented in the workforce. Black and Latino people make up 11% and 16% of the overall U.S. workforce, respectively, but only hold 5% and 8% of engineering jobs<sup>22</sup> and 7% each of computer science jobs. The situation is significantly worse for women, who account for nearly half of the overall workforce, but hold only 14% of engineering jobs.<sup>23</sup> Women’s representation in computer

jobs, a field that includes computer scientists, software developers and programmers, has actually decreased, from 32% in 1990 to 25% in 2016.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of diversity begins early on. A 2019 study conducted by Junior Achievement found that only 9% of girls ages 13 to 17 expressed an interest in STEM careers, down from 11% in a similar survey from 2018.<sup>25</sup> By comparison, interest among teen boys is three times higher at 27%.<sup>26</sup> Also, while white youth and youth of color express similar levels of interest in STEM, youth of color are more likely to transfer or drop out of postsecondary STEM programs.<sup>27</sup> In the Draw-A-Scientist tests, 70% of 6-year-old girls drew a woman scientist, but by age 16 this dropped to just 16%.<sup>28</sup> The portrayal of STEM professionals in the media often serves to reinforce stereotypes about the field. An analysis of STEM characters in popular films from 2002 to 2014 found that women were given half the number of speaking roles as men and often cast in subordinate roles such as research assistants.<sup>29</sup>



A STEM workforce that includes female, Black and Latino professionals leads to increased perspectives, greater innovation and more effective problem-solving.<sup>30</sup>

With an estimated 2.4 million jobs having gone unfilled in 2018 and STEM jobs expected to increase 8% by 2029, there is a desperate need for STEM workers.<sup>31,32</sup> Misperceptions about the field, however, combined with a lack of interest, mentors and role models, and support from parents and teachers ultimately deter girls and youth of color from pursuing STEM careers.<sup>33</sup>

## STEM IN BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS

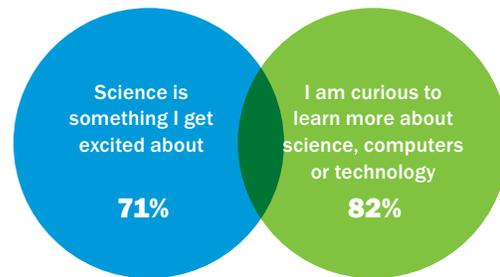
High-quality STEM programming in the afterschool space is an important strategy for addressing diversity and preparing youth for a future STEM career. More than 70% of students in afterschool STEM programs reported positive gains in STEM interest, career knowledge, and social-emotional skills such as perseverance and critical thinking.<sup>34</sup> Findings were significantly greater for youth participating in programs for four weeks or longer. These social-emotional skills are also important in a field that is not always welcoming to women, Black and Latino people. The ability to solve problems and persevere are especially crucial for youth in overcoming insufficient academic preparation, limited opportunities, and experiences of exclusion and isolation.<sup>35</sup>

Clubs implement engaging STEM programming that builds skills and encourages youth to see a future in STEM. Family STEM nights and computer programming “hackathon” events encourage creativity and perseverance, and local field trips to planetariums expose youth to a variety of STEM experiences. In the DIY STEM program, youth engage in fun, hands-on activities that introduce them to science concepts with real-world applications. They collaborate and activate problem-solving skills in creating a homemade light bulb or developing a water filtration device. During Summer Brain Gain, a program to combat summer learning loss, Clubs help youth learn by exploring topics such as forensics, animation and food science. Clubs also provide members with mentors, networking opportunities and career days to pursue their STEM interests.

## THE IMPACT OF STEM ON CLUB MEMBERS

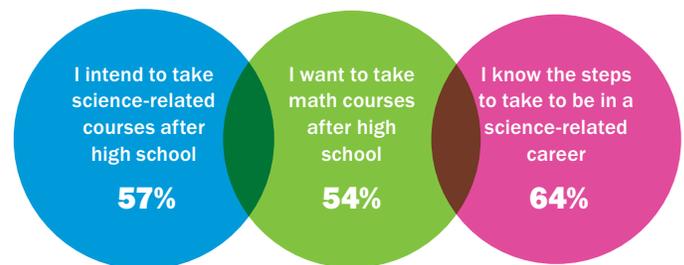
Club members show a strong interest in STEM programming. According to NYOI data, 71% of Club members report getting excited about science, and 82% are curious to learn more about science, computers or technology.

A majority of Club members express interest in STEM.



Additionally, more than half of surveyed high school Club members intend to take science-related courses after high school or want to take math courses after high school.

High school Club members are committed to STEM.

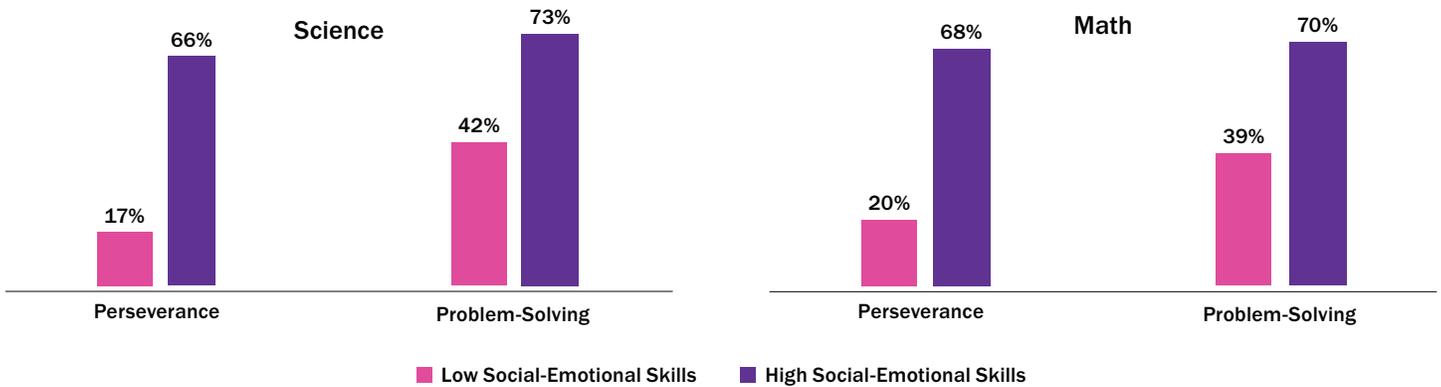


Club teens who report having strong problem-solving and perseverance skills are more likely to want to take science and math courses after high school, compared to Club teens reporting low social-emotional skills. For example, 66% with high perseverance indicated that they are likely to take a science class after high school compared to 17% of those with low perseverance (see graph on next page).



Club teens with strong social-emotional skills are more likely to plan to take STEM-related classes after high school.

% who intend to take science and math classes



# Preparing Youth for Postsecondary Education

## BARRIERS TO CONTINUING EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Even though young people have more alternative routes to enter the workforce than they once did, postsecondary education still matters. Those with more formal postsecondary education benefit from greater opportunities, lower unemployment and higher earnings potential.<sup>36</sup> An estimated 5 million jobs requiring postsecondary education will go unfilled in 2020, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts the greatest growth in employment from 2018 to 2028 will be among those occupations requiring some form of formal postsecondary education (whether a certificate, associates degree or higher degree).<sup>37,38</sup>

Despite the increasing importance of a postsecondary education in preparing for a globally competitive workplace,

many young people are opting out. One of the biggest reasons is cost. In 2019, the average total price of tuition was \$33,000 for trade schools; \$50,880 for a public two-year institution; and \$87,800 for a public four-year institution at an in-state rate.<sup>39,40</sup>

To help cover these costs, students can apply for financial aid, but many are unable to navigate the complex process. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is completed by students to determine their eligibility for financial aid, has been criticized for being unwieldy and overly complicated. In fact, 43% of high school seniors didn't complete the application in 2019.<sup>41</sup> This means that \$2.6 billion in available federal aid went unclaimed.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to overcoming financial barriers, young people also have to prepare for entrance exams, apply for scholarships and navigate the application process. This can be especially challenging for first-generation students whose caregivers never attended postsecondary school and lack the firsthand experience to guide their children through these complex systems. While guidance counselors are charged with helping students plan for life post-high school, they are often stretched thin and overwhelmed with large

caseloads.<sup>43</sup> Slightly more than half of youth report that their school has helped them to understand the steps they needed to apply to college, and only about half report using support services to prepare them for future goals.<sup>44</sup>

Even after being accepted, students need support registering for classes, applying for housing and submitting transcripts. Confused by the process, up to one-third of students with plans to attend college do not make it to classes in the fall, a phenomenon known as “summer melt.”<sup>45</sup> The melt rate for students from low-income families and those planning to attend community colleges can be as high as 40%.<sup>46</sup>



For those who successfully clear the hurdles of preparing, applying and enrolling in postsecondary institutions, the challenges don't stop there. About 33% of first-generation students, the vast majority of whom are students of color, drop out by the third year.<sup>47</sup> The dropout rate at community colleges is even higher, with less than 40% graduating or transferring within six years.<sup>48</sup> Financial pressure and academic disqualification are the reasons most cited for dropping out, but many students, especially students of color, also feel unwelcome and unsupported on campus.<sup>49</sup>

## CLUBS PROVIDE YOUTH WITH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SUPPORT

Overcoming these barriers requires significant perseverance and problem-solving. Students need to persevere through difficulties and the obstacles placed before them. Social-emotional skills such as perseverance are positively correlated with academic performance, and their broader application can promote success outside of the classroom as well.<sup>50</sup>

The work to prepare young people for educational options after high school starts from the moment they step inside a Club. Clubs integrate career exploration throughout all program areas, from arts to leadership to health and wellness, so that youth of all ages are exposed to different career options. Clubs also coordinate college tours and alumni visits, host career days, offer SAT and ACT prep courses, and provide guidance throughout the college application process.

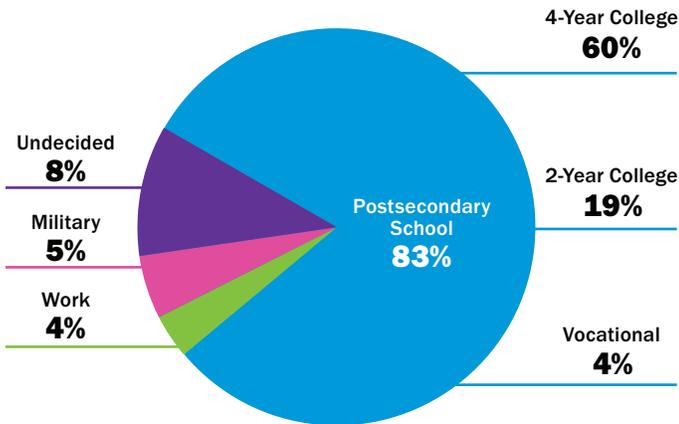
Skill-building programs provide teens with the opportunity to learn social-emotional and other skills and practice them within an educational context. In the Diplomas to Degrees program, teens inventory their potential career interests and map the steps to gain entry to a postsecondary institution that meets their needs and interests. The CareerLaunch program offers activities that help Club youth explore different careers and identify the skills and education needed for a specific career path. Teens gain financial literacy skills through the Money Matters: Make it Count program, which teaches youth how to plan for their future goals through budgeting, managing debt and saving for postsecondary education and beyond.



## POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION READINESS AMONG CLUB MEMBERS

Across all age groups, 82% of Club members expect to complete some postsecondary education. Among Club members in 11th and 12th grades, 53% reported participating in a college preparation program at the Club, an opportunity that BGCA and Clubs are working to extend to all high school members. Of the Club teens who participated in one of these programs, over 93% agreed that they know what education or training they will need for the career they want, and 88% agreed that they know what costs to expect for the education or training they need after high school.

Most Club juniors and seniors who completed a college prep program are planning to pursue a postsecondary education.

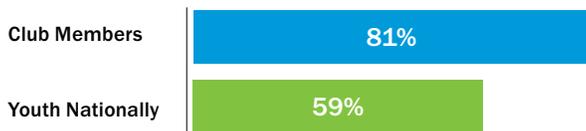


“ 81% of Club juniors and seniors who completed a college prep program reported they are making immediate plans to enroll in postsecondary education, compared to 59% of high school students nationally.

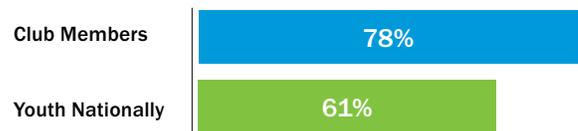
Over three-quarters of these Club juniors and seniors (81%) also reported that they are making immediate plans to enroll in some type of postsecondary education, compared to 59% of high school students nationally.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, 78% of the Club seniors reported submitting the FAFSA, compared to 61% of high school seniors nationally.<sup>52</sup>



Club juniors and seniors are more likely to plan to enroll in a postsecondary education compared to peers nationally.\*



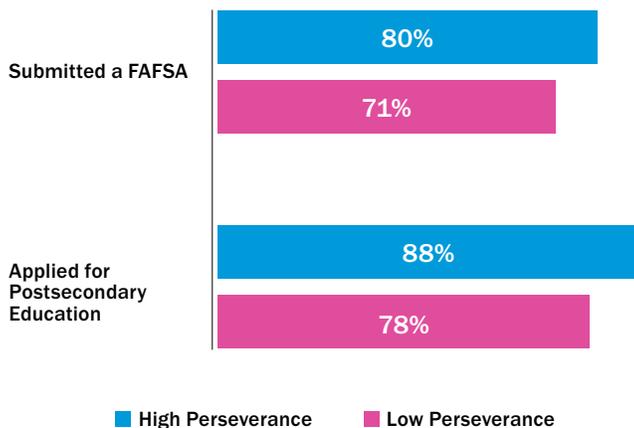
Club seniors are more likely to have submitted a FAFSA compared to peers nationally.\*



\*Club member percentages based on those who participated in a college preparation program at the Club.

Club members in high school who report higher levels of perseverance are more likely to submit a FAFSA and apply for postsecondary education than their Club peers reporting lower levels of perseverance. This demonstrates the importance of including social-emotional skill development in college and career readiness programs.

Club high schoolers with high levels of perseverance are more likely to take steps toward a postsecondary education.



## Priming Youth for Success in the Modern Workforce

“Early exposure to the working world is vital to future career choices. Young people start building their career expectations as early as age 11.”

### CLOSING SKILLS AND DIVERSITY GAPS IN THE WORKFORCE

Women and people of color account for the fastest-growing shares of the U.S. population, but only account for 47% and 36% of the overall U.S. workforce.<sup>53</sup> Industries that intentionally invest in these groups at an early age have the potential to increase their bottom line. Companies who are in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 33% more likely to have above average financial returns.<sup>54</sup> Equipping young people of all backgrounds, especially those who have been historically underrepresented,



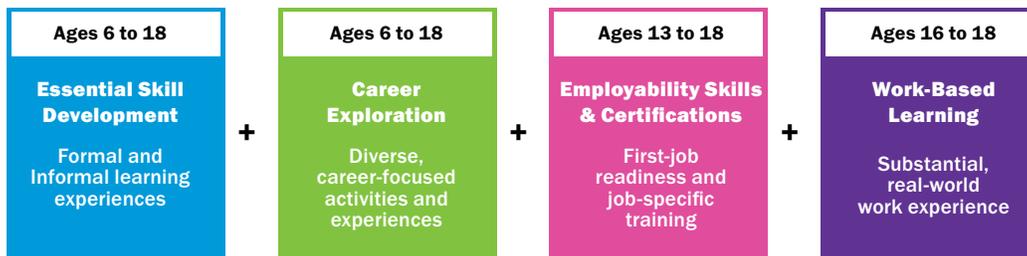
with the knowledge, skills and experiences needed to be successful will help close gaps, expand the talent pool and increase productivity.

Traditionally, workforce development programs have targeted adults and high school students needing jobs. However, starting skill development much earlier increases the likelihood that young people will acquire the essential skills needed for workplace success that they can build upon throughout adulthood.<sup>55</sup> Early exposure to the working world is also vital to future career choices, and young people start building their career expectations as early as age 11.<sup>56</sup>

## CLUBS PREPARE YOUTH TO BE WORKFORCE READY

BGCA's approach features four pillars to guide Clubs in creating a workforce readiness culture in which young people can define and achieve their career plans. From the moment youth enter the Club, programs and experiences that integrate skill building and career exploration provide them with opportunities to connect their passions and talents to careers and apply those skills in real-life work experiences.

### Workforce Readiness Pillars



Experts debate what to call the skills needed for workplace success. Common terms include soft skills, 21st century skills, social-emotional skills and employability skills. In its workforce readiness approach, BGCA uses the term “essential skills,” which combines social-emotional skills such as problem-solving and employability skills like dependability into one cluster.

Essential skills are critical in the workplace. In 2013 more than half of U.S. employers stated that their biggest obstacle to growth was finding qualified candidates with the interpersonal and self-regulation skills they needed the most.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, a 2017 Business Roundtable survey of employers found that although critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills were highly relevant to positions within their companies, these were also the skills that were challenging to find in qualified job candidates.<sup>58</sup>

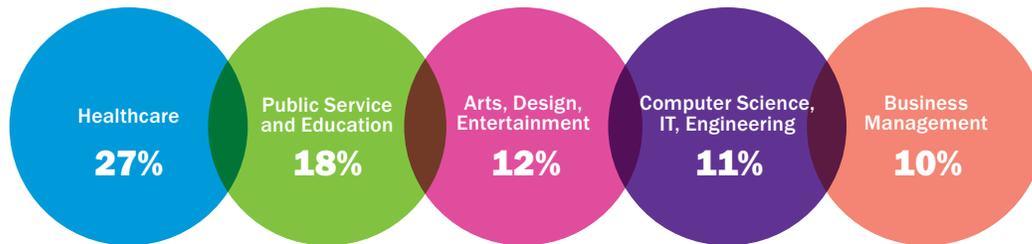
### DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Clubs provide multiple opportunities for youth to build and practice essential workforce skills. For example, youth may have assigned responsibilities such as assisting with serving snacks, co-facilitating activities or collecting sports equipment. Staff set expectations during program time to teach and reinforce workplace expectations such as punctuality, dependability and teamwork and recognize youth when they are demonstrating these behaviors.

### EXPLORING CAREERS

Career exploration takes two forms: exposure and exploration. Exposure activities are for all ages, sparking young people's interest by exposing them to diverse career paths. Club staff integrate career exploration into all programs and activities, bring in guest speakers and take youth on workplace tours and career fairs. Clubs more

Club teens are interested in a wide range of careers.



deeply engage teens by dedicating time for them to discover careers that match their talents and interests and learning what it takes to be successful in those industries. Opportunities include job shadowing, mentorship and interviewing, where teens can view careers firsthand and meet professionals in those careers. See above for the top five career interests among teens participating in the Keystone Club program in 2019.<sup>59</sup>

NYOI data reveals a link between career exploration programs and problem-solving and perseverance skills. Of Club teens who attended a career exploration program, 84% reported having strong problem-solving skills and 60% had strong perseverance skills, compared to 74% and 54% of Club teens who did not attend such a program, respectively.

### **BUILDING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND EARNING CERTIFICATIONS**

Clubs help young people gain the skills needed to seek, secure and sustain a job over time, and build job-specific technical skills. Partnerships with local employers, postsecondary and vocational training institutions and government agencies enable Clubs to offer older teens industry-specific training and certification programs in their areas of interest. Teens earn certifications in areas such as first aid/CPR, phlebotomy, information technology, welding and warehouse logistics. NYOI data shows Club teens need such opportunities, with only 28% of them reporting they have a job.

### **APPLYING SKILLS THROUGH WORK-BASED LEARNING**

Clubs provide youth with structured learning experiences in which they can apply newly gained skills in real-world work environments. These experiences can include service-learning projects, first jobs, internships in the Club or with external companies, and pre-apprenticeships. BGCA's national partnership with Gap Inc. has enabled the company to significantly expand its This Way Ahead internship program. The program builds a talent pipeline for the company and supports Club teens who traditionally have had barriers to securing their first job. Clubs partner with local Old Navy stores to provide teens with exposure to retail careers, job readiness preparation, opportunities to apply and interview for part-time and seasonal jobs, and coaching through the hiring process. In 2019, nearly 5,000 teens participated in these workforce readiness activities.





“ They look in their backyards and think that’s all they have. We can show them that there’s a world beyond by giving meaningful experiences that their schools can’t. – Jon Blodgett, Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg & Leominster

### **Club Goes Full STEAM Ahead to Help Youth Prepare for Career Success**

About 10 years ago, the Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg & Leominster redefined itself as a STEAM out-of-school-time program. Seeing local schools’ resource constraints, the Club committed to infusing science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics into all of its programming.

“Our schools do a lot of sports programs, and the benefits of those are great, but you’ve got to also be able to practice technical skills and expose youth to all kinds of varied experiences,” said Teen Center Director Jon Blodgett. Staff tie everything young people do at the Club to the world of work.

Club staff use programs like First Robotics, Girls Who Code, App Inventor and even beekeeping to expose members to varied STEAM career pathways. Even programs that aren’t specifically science-focused such as CareerLaunch get the

STEAM treatment. Teens identify their career interests, research career paths, build basic employability skills, and complete internships and field experiences, focusing on STEAM-related careers. Club members have interned at hospitals, newspapers, art museums, and heating and air conditioning companies. Additionally, Club teens can participate in a Counselor in Training program during the summer, then become paid Junior Staff within the Club. Frequent guest speakers introduce youth to many career and Postsecondary education pathways.

A fun example of entrepreneurship that came out of this programming is BGCPrint, an apparel screen-printing enterprise. Club teens wanted to learn what it was like to own a business. Local Chamber of Commerce members coached them on how to develop a business plan, find prospective investors, and make a pitch. The teens generated \$20,000 to set up their business, and they now screen-print shirts for the Club and other customers.

Club leaders recognize that people of color and women are underrepresented in STEAM fields. Some opportunities, like Girls Who Code, are open to girls only. With the diversity in the surrounding community, the Club’s membership increasingly includes more youth of color. Being intentional about bringing in women and people of color as guest speakers helps youth to see themselves in a wider variety of careers. “Many youth may think their opportunities are limited,” said Blodgett. “But with what they are exposed to at the Club, they see many more opportunities.”

The Club also uses its STEAM and workforce readiness programming to teach social-emotional skills like perseverance and problem-solving. Club staff design activities so youth can work collaboratively and practice skills like public speaking and making business pitches.

“We help teens figure out what path they need to take to achieve their goals and how they should get started,” said Blodgett.

Youth are expected to follow strict guidelines to complete certifications and held accountable to follow through on their commitments. “We’ve had kids who failed to complete CareerLaunch multiple times, but we always allow them to keep coming back and try again. If they are willing to persevere, we will always give them support. We love creating opportunity.”

These opportunities have made a huge impact. The Club’s teen membership has risen from an average of 12 teens daily five years ago to now over 80. Youth are excited to explore their interests and plug into opportunities in their community, and community leaders have embraced the Club’s strategy.

“Local businesses are keenly interested in helping to develop the workforce of tomorrow,” said Club CEO Donata Martin.

At this Club, tomorrow is looking exceptionally bright.





# Developing 21st Century Leaders

Young people, their families and communities are being confronted with numerous life-altering challenges: social and race-based injustice, climate change, economic upheaval as a result of COVID-19, and the widening fault lines caused by political division.

Youth voice, agency and mobilization have been central to driving positive, meaningful change within every movement throughout history.<sup>60</sup> Once again, youth are rising to the challenge as leaders to demand social, political and economic change. They are being called out to the streets to protest, serving as thought leaders, developing innovative and creative solutions, and demanding a voice in decisions that impact their current reality and future.<sup>61</sup>



As supportive facilitators, advocates and allies in their growth and development, Club staff partner with young people to create a safe, inclusive environment. Within this nurturing environment, youth can develop into future world leaders by following a character-building trajectory:

- ◆ **Build Foundational Social-Emotional Skills –** Youth practice and build social-emotional skills by participating in Club programming and interacting with caring adult staff. These essential skills include having healthy relationships with others, making sound decisions and communicating effectively.

- ◆ **Participate in Service-Learning Opportunities –** Youth take on developmentally appropriate leadership opportunities in programs such as SMART Girls in Action, Keystone Club, Torch Club and Youth of the Year Suite. Youth also participate in service-learning opportunities that allow them to explore their Club and community. By confronting familiar and unfamiliar challenges, youth see the world through a new lens and identify how they can create positive change. These experiences help young people build skills such as empathy, perspective-taking and problem-solving.
- ◆ **Lead Change –** Youth take on increasing leadership opportunities in and outside of the Club by identifying pressing issues affecting their peers, community and the world. They spotlight needs such as mental health, racial inequity and immigration by participating in National Keystone Conferences, local demonstrations addressing climate change and racial equity, civic activities, and youth-led efforts to build a positive Club environment. They galvanize their peers and partner with Club staff to develop responsive solutions.

Throughout this process, youth learn from and partner with peers and staff who model social-emotional skills that develop strong character. This growth is the necessary foundation for developing leaders and change agents.

## Laying a Critical Character Development Foundation

As youth build and practice social-emotional skills, they develop key character traits that are then demonstrated or reflected in their behaviors. For example, when youth are respectful to others, they work together and

communicate effectively with one another even when there are disagreements. The social-emotional skills associated with showing respect include empathy, communication, perspective-taking and inclusion. Another example of character development is when youth demonstrate caring. When youth are caring, they appreciate and have compassion for the feelings, experiences and perspectives of others. Youth can better understand that their lived experiences<sup>62</sup> are different from the lived experiences of others. In sharing with each other how they have previously encountered and interacted with police officers or other authority figures, for example, young people who are white might find that their own experiences differ markedly from those of their Black or Latino peers. Youth demonstrate compassion for others through ethically responsible actions. As with the character trait of respect, social-emotional skills form the foundation of these behaviors.

One way to facilitate young people's strong character development is by engaging them in service learning. Service learning refers to opportunities that actively engage youth in diverse experiences that aim to benefit others. The key difference between service learning and community service is that the former allows youth to gain a deeper understanding of their efforts, such as volunteering at a community food pantry or neighborhood cleanup, through meaningful reflection and perspective taking.<sup>63,64</sup> In doing so, youth cultivate solidarity with those who may or may not have a shared lived experience and build compassion and critical social consciousness.<sup>65</sup>

For many youth, service learning creates a pathway for moving from involvement in charity or school-mandated community service to social justice and positive change making.<sup>66</sup> As youth become more engaged in the important issues affecting their peers and community, they are more likely to develop a stronger sense of empathy and self-efficacy,<sup>67</sup> in addition to the ability to develop healthy relationships and effectively solve problems.<sup>68</sup>



## Building Leadership Skills at the Club

The demand for strong character and leadership skills is increasing in classrooms and workplaces. Being able to think critically, demonstrate empathy for others, communicate effectively, solve problems and collaborate well are necessary skills for young people to navigate the challenges of adolescence and adulthood.<sup>69</sup>

By participating in diverse Club programs and activities that promote social-emotional skills, youth develop the strong character traits central to being effective leaders and agents of change among their peers and within their communities. Clubs provide progressive programming that evolves along with young people as they get older. This approach keeps youth engaged and challenged and builds on their existing knowledge and skills.<sup>70</sup> For example, the SMART Girls in Action program offers a series of sessions designed to build self-esteem, support positive identity formation and develop leadership skills among girls. It uses different types of small- and large-group activities that emphasize discussion and reflection and allow staff to adapt activities to support youth skill-building and interests.



Club staff engage youth by creating formal and informal roles that allow them to develop and practice leadership skills. Staff may give members the opportunity to manage a task or provide input into how they spend their time within a program space. For example, the youngest members may assist in surveying their peers about their interests and passions, which can inform the development of themed activities for the week. Older youth and teens are offered more autonomy, voice and choice to determine which skills they want to build, whether that is building employability skills, mastering a new art technique or participating in a robotics competition. They also assume leadership roles on Club youth councils that advise staff on programming or as officers in small-group leadership development programs such as Torch Club and Keystone Club.

Clubs also encourage young people's leadership and activism through Club programs such as the Youth of the Year Suite, Keystone Club, Torch Club and guided service-learning activities.<sup>71</sup> The Youth of the Year Suite creates opportunities for youth to showcase their leadership ability and be recognized among their peers, within their Club and at state, regional and national levels. Youth take part in hands-on activities that explore topics such as identity, passion, personal branding, voice, teamwork and goal setting. Clubs offer additional service-learning opportunities through the Torch Club, Keystone Club and Million Members, Million Hours of Service programs. While designed for tweens and teens, these programs are adaptable for the youngest Club members. These fun and highly interactive experiences put youth at the center of their own learning, whether it is discovering personal passions, identifying community needs, designing and completing service projects, or engaging other youth to foster change.

The skills that young people develop within the safe, supportive and inclusive environment of the Club, in

partnership and collaboration with caring adult staff and peers, are strengthened and reinforced through practice, hands-on learning and application in their own lives. These skills are easily transferable as youth navigate their ecosystem. In doing so, young people will continue to make the institutions that shape their world, like schools, community organizations, governments and corporations, more accountable, effective, equitable and inclusive.

“ Club members in 8th, 10th and 12th grades volunteer at significantly higher rates than their peers nationally.



# Club Youth Lead and Make Change

BGCA's NYOI survey data shows that members are building the social-emotional skills that lead to strong character and leadership through their Club participation.

Forbes defines leadership as “a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, toward the achievement of a goal.”<sup>72</sup> Club members report having the makings of leaders and change agents, such as being empathetic and confident in their own efficacy, who are ready to take transformative steps toward a great future for all.

For example, as shown below, 92% of Club youth actively try to help when they see others in need, and 86% think about how their decision-making will affect others. As leaders, 76% feel equipped to organize a team of their peers to complete a project, and when goals are set, 87% report taking action to achieve them.

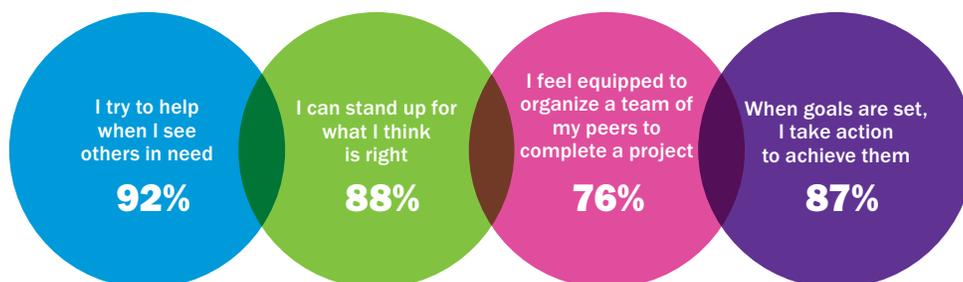
As agents of change, 88% of Club members report that they feel like they can stand up for what they think is right, even if their peers disagree. Nearly three-quarters

(73%) of members spend their time with others to address community needs, and 81% believe that they can make a difference in their community. With this strong character and leadership foundation, Club youth are better equipped to help address the most pressing needs of their generation.

Regarding Club members' levels of volunteerism, when we compare Club teens to teens nationally who have participated in the Monitoring the Future study (MTF), the findings are especially positive. Conducted by the University of Michigan annually since 1975, MTF examines the behaviors, attitudes and values of U.S. students in eighth, 10th and 12th grades.<sup>73</sup>

As shown on the next page, both NYOI and MTF data show that the rate of teens volunteering at least once a month increases with age. This makes sense given volunteering and community service requirements for high school graduation. But more importantly, the data show that Club members in eighth, 10th and 12th grades volunteer at significantly higher rates than their same-grade peers nationally. At each of these grade levels, almost twice as many Club members report that they volunteer at least monthly than their peers nationally.

Club youth demonstrate leadership traits and behaviors.





### More Club teens volunteer at least monthly compared to teens nationally.

% who volunteer at least once per month



“ Our teens see and believe they’re exceptional, and they can point to the real impact they have made in their Club and community. – Rich Barrows, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver

#### Club Builds Leaders and Change Agents – One Day, One Youth at a Time

“It’s not just about implementing certain programs,” said Rich Barrows, Denver Broncos Boys & Girls Club unit director. “Our philosophy is to demonstrate these kids are exceptional, to themselves and to others. This approach to everything we do in the Club is more impactful than just an individual program.”

The Club, part of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro

Denver, has been a valued community asset for over 17 years thanks to a continued partnership with the NFL’s Denver Broncos. The Club has worked with multiple generations of youth from many of the same families. With a teen center next to the original Clubhouse, the Club serves mostly Black and Latino youth ages 6 to 18. Club staff describe the surrounding neighborhood as “working class,” with 95% people of color with low incomes.

The staff know that building nurturing relationships with youth is essential for the Club’s programming to have a positive impact on them. “I love working with kids, building a connection with them, bringing them opportunities, seeing them grow,” said long-time staff member Lisa Ford. “I love to see the impact we’ve had on the ones people said wouldn’t make it, and they have made it.”

At the Club, staff set high expectations for youth and serve as role models. “I wanted to work for Clubs to be a good support for children, to show

them a good representation, someone who looks like them,” said staff member Ari Richardson. She likes “how excited youth get when they reach goals they didn’t think they could reach.”

Club staff develop young people’s character and leadership through progressive programming, which builds on their existing knowledge and skills and evolves as youth age. Younger members start out in the Cherish Club and the Boys Club, where they practice making decisions and taking on leadership roles.

At 10 years old, youth can graduate to the Torch Club to strengthen their leadership skills and continue developing the social-emotional skills of empathy and self-efficacy. Torch Club members elect officers and plan and execute their own projects. Staff advise, but the youth decide what they will do and how. “I help them work together to solve problems within our community, learn how they’re not the only ones who struggle, and look at their own actions and how they impact others,” said Richardson. The Denver Broncos Torch Club won a 2018-19 National Project Award for inspiring and recognizing kindness in their community. They made gift boxes for “Hometown Heroes” like firefighters, school janitors and nurses, and created a “Kind Tree” with students from a nearby school in which they wrote caring messages on the leaves.

Youth ages 14 and older can participate in the Keystone Club, leading activities and projects related to academic success, career exploration and community service. The Denver Broncos Keystone Club has a strong focus on service, with staff tracking high school members’ service

hours and offering incentives to encourage them to persevere. The Keystone Club has completed many projects, from organizing Club Family Nights and neighborhood events to reduce gun violence, to partnering with local agencies to promote physical and mental health, and working with school professionals to increase attendance.

The Club staff understand that their job is to help young people become confident, empowered leaders and change agents. “We’ve had a lot of success with our character and leadership programming,” said Barrows. “Our teens see and believe they’re exceptional, and they can point to the real impact they have made in their Club and community.”





# Developing a Healthier Generation

When young people live healthy lifestyles, they are able to make decisions that result in their social, emotional and physical well-being.

Boys & Girls Clubs develop a healthier generation through programs, practices and experiences that support overall wellness and enable youth to:

- ◆ **Build Foundational Social-Emotional Skills** – Youth practice and build social-emotional skills through participation in Club programming and interactions with caring adult staff. Essential skills include healthy decision-making, stress management and perseverance.
- ◆ **Make Healthy Choices** – Youth make healthy choices such as participating in a healthy cooking competition, learning positive ways to manage stress, or preparing campaigns encouraging their peers to avoid unhealthy behaviors such as substance use.
- ◆ **Engage in Physical Activity** – Youth have opportunities throughout the Club day to engage in physical activity during check-in, transition times between activities, in the gym or outdoors, and within varied program sessions that encourage movement.

## Promoting Physical Activity and Wellness

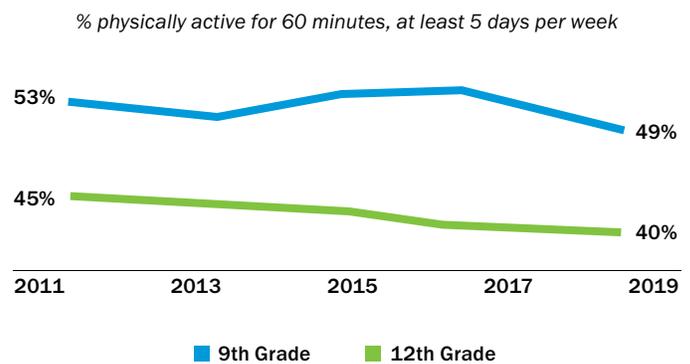
### YOUTH AND TEENS DON'T GET ENOUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, offering immediate and short-term health benefits for youth and protecting against long-term chronic health conditions into adulthood. Youth who are physically active have stronger hearts, bones and muscles than their

inactive peers and an increased ability to concentrate and pay attention. Being physically active in childhood also protects against developing chronic conditions such as heart disease or Type 2 diabetes as an adult.<sup>74</sup> It can also reduce or even eliminate symptoms of depression and anxiety in teens and adults.<sup>75,76,77</sup> Young people who are physically active are more likely to remain active as they age, compounding these health benefits.<sup>78</sup>

Yet despite the benefits, most youth do not get the amount of physical activity they need to thrive. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that youth ages 6 to 17 get 60 minutes of physical activity a day, seven days per week.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately only 23% of high schoolers meet these recommendations, with 44% reporting 60 minutes of physical activity five days per week, and 17% reporting no physical activity at all. The data also shows that participation in physical activity declines as youth approach adulthood, with the number of older teens getting sufficient physical activity steadily declining since 2011.<sup>80</sup>

### Physical activity rates among teens have been declining since 2011, especially among older teens.



Several factors contribute to the declining rates of physical activity among children and teens. Youth are spending increasing amounts of time in front of a screen for reasons

other than schoolwork. The number of teens who report using a screen for three or more hours a day increased from 22% in 2003 to 46% in 2019 and is likely to keep rising.<sup>81,82</sup> This is especially true as COVID-19 disrupted in-person activities and more schools offered online learning. Additionally, schools are offering fewer physical activity options during the day. Only half of school districts require or recommend daily recess for elementary-age youth, and fewer than one in 10 schools require daily physical education.<sup>83</sup>

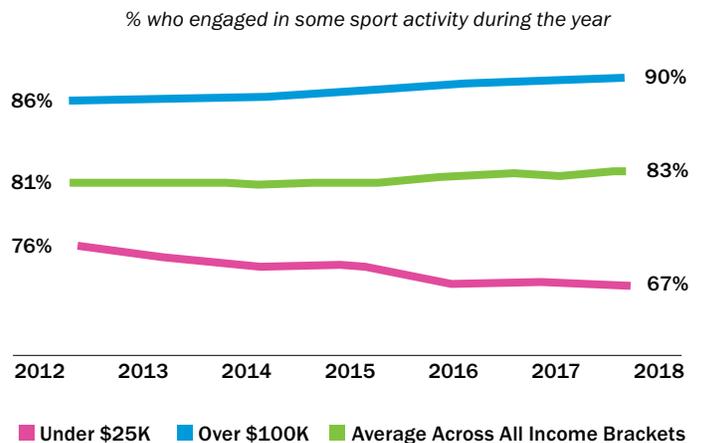
### GENDER AND AGE DISPARITIES

Differences in physical activity exist between males and females. A high school male is twice as likely to meet physical activity recommendations compared to a high school female. Fewer females participate in daily physical activity as they age, so that by 12th grade, only 16% of females compared to 33% of males take part in the recommended amounts of physical activity. One explanation for these differences may be differing goals. Previous research has shown that males identified “becoming muscular” as their main motivation to participate in sports, whereas females prioritized friendships, fitness and sociability and did not often find these benefits by participating in physical activity.<sup>84,85,86</sup>

### SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES

Youth sports also provide regular opportunities for physical activity. While participation in youth sports has increased overall in recent years, it has been unequally distributed. The percentage of youth participating in sports from families making \$100,000 or more a year increased from 86% in 2012 to 90% in 2018. Meanwhile, only 67% of youth from the lowest income bracket (families making \$25,000 or less a year) engaged in sport activities in 2018, a decrease from 76% in 2012.<sup>87</sup>

### Sports participation is on the decline among youth from the lowest income bracket.



These disparities may be due partly to the increasing costs of youth sports. A family can expect to pay an average of \$125 per year in registration fees for a single child for one sport. When equipment, uniforms and travel are added in, the total annual cost for one child playing a sport averages to more than \$600.<sup>88</sup>

### CLUBS REMOVE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Clubs provide youth with opportunities to be physically active throughout the Club day. These include offering free play upon check-in, incorporating physical activity breaks during assemblies and transitions between program sessions, and facilitating interactive community builders as part of programs. The “Play Breaks Guide” and “Transitions Playbook” from BGCA offer a variety of fun movement activities and games that can be implemented in any Club space. Most Clubs also have physical space devoted to physical activity or movement, such as a gym, outdoor field, multipurpose room, dance studio or gamesroom



where scheduled activities and events take place. All of these opportunities add up and help youth achieve the recommended amounts of daily physical activity.

Additionally, Clubs provide youth with access to sport leagues and organized sports programs. These programs ensure that all youth, regardless of gender, income or skill level, can experience high-quality youth sports. Partnerships with uniform and equipment suppliers provide free or discounted uniforms and gear required for practices and games. These offerings help decrease financial barriers that may prohibit families from participating in sports.

Clubs also intentionally address gender and age-related disparities. In the Takeover Thursday initiative, for example, Thursdays are dedicated to physical activity and sports for girls. Offerings include female-only open gym time, league games, or having a female athlete host a fitness class. Staff consult young people to design activities that meet their interests, such as escape rooms and step contests. Clubs are placing more emphasis on lifelong physical activities, such as yoga, dance and canoeing or hiking, to help youth find their favorite way to stay active beyond their years as a Club member.

### **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SUPPORTS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING**

Physical activity also enables youth to practice and build social-emotional skills such as perseverance, decision making and stress management.<sup>89</sup> Club members learn perseverance when they repeatedly practice a new or challenging skill, like jumping rope, and how to cope and keep on going if they lose a game. They also practice decision-making during games when they think about how to get around a defender or make a good pass to a teammate. Partnerships between BGCA and sports organizations like Jr. National Basketball Association and National Football League Flag Football provide Club staff

and volunteer coaches with practice plans for all ages and skill levels to ensure that every experience includes well-organized, progressive skill building.

The U.S. Soccer Foundation recently adapted its soccer curriculum for Clubs. The program introduces youth to the sport in a supportive environment by focusing on individual skill progression and social-emotional development. Each session teaches youth fundamental soccer skills while blending in nutrition education and social-emotional skills like decision making, impulse control and perseverance. These skills are integrated in program sessions through group agreements, emotional check-ins, youth-led pickup games, warm-ups and reflections. The health and nutrition information is integrated seamlessly during practice, with youth learning about healthy foods that will give them more energy without interrupting the physical activity.



“ 51% of Club teens report engaging in regular physical activity five days a week, compared to 44% of teens nationally.

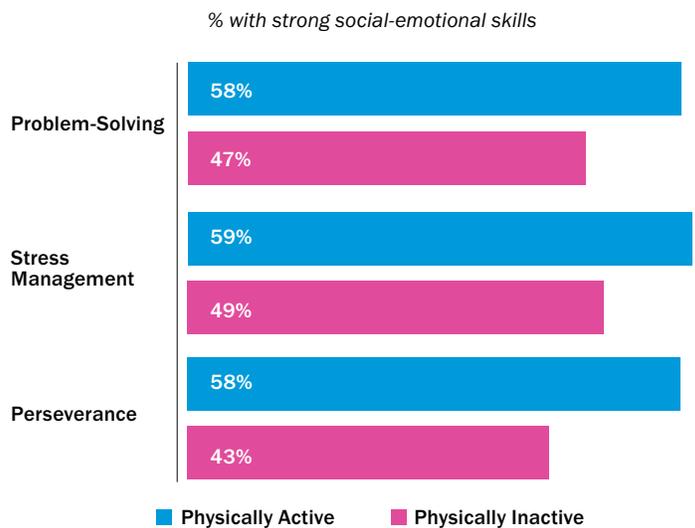
### CLUB MEMBERS REAP THE BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Club teens are more physically active than their national peers; 51% report engaging in regular physical activity five days a week, compared to 44% of teens nationally. Additionally, Club teen girls are more active than teen girls nationally, with 40% of Club females reporting regular physical activity, compared to 35% of their peers nationally (see graph below).

Participation in physical activity is also linked with stronger social-emotional skills in Club members. Members who report meeting physical activity guidelines have stronger social-emotional skills compared to Club peers who are less

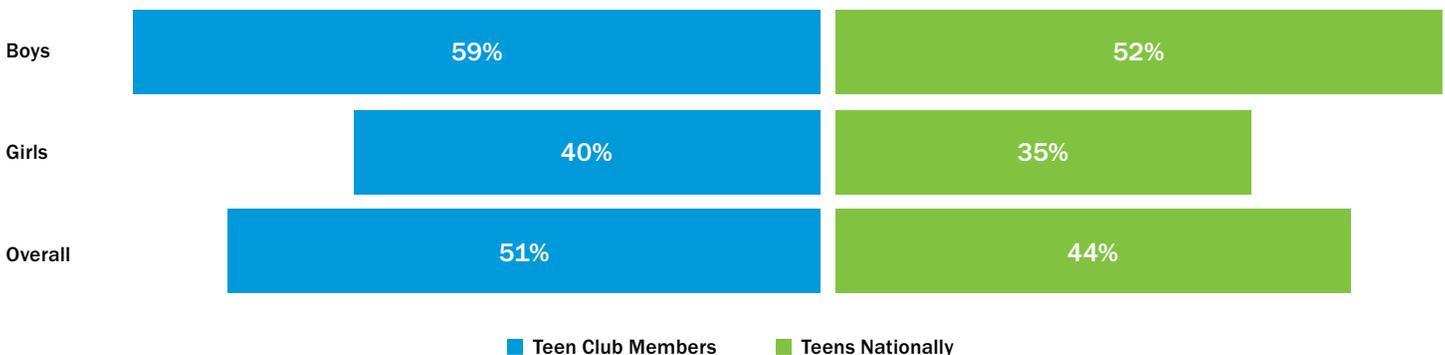
active. For example, 58% of members who are physically active five or more days a week report strong perseverance skills, but among members who are not physically active, only 43% report strong perseverance skills.

Club members who are physically active are more likely to display strong social-emotional skills.



### Club teens are more likely to engage in physical activity regularly compared to teens nationally.

*% physically active for 60 minutes, at least 5 days per week among high schoolers*





“ What they’ll remember looking back are the fun times, the camaraderie with other players, and the supportive relationships with staff. – Jake Wilson, Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Wyoming

### **Club Provides Year-Round Sports and Fitness Opportunities for Youth**

Neither age nor gender, family income nor skill level, rain nor snow nor gloom of winter night prevents young people from enjoying healthy physical activity at Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Wyoming. With year-round sports leagues, clinics featuring college athletes, and other fun activities, the Club makes sure of that.

The organization’s robust offerings, and its dedication to meeting the needs of the youth and families served by the organization, are crushing many of the barriers that keep young people from getting regular physical activity.

Club sports leagues – which include T-ball, flag football, summer basketball and indoor soccer – serve some 1,500 to 2,000 athletes, ages 6 to 18, per year. While girls often have fewer opportunities for sports participation, all of the organization’s leagues are co-ed. The organization has explored offering girls-only leagues, said CEO Ashley Bright,

but has found more community interest in co-ed sports. The Club keeps the cost to families low: generally a \$25 registration fee plus the \$10 annual Club membership dues. The Club waives fees for parents who volunteer to coach.

In most games no one keeps score. The focus is on having fun, said Athletic Coordinator Jake Wilson. “It’s about the kids and them having a good experience. What they’ll remember looking back are the fun times, the camaraderie with other players, and the supportive relationships with staff.”

When the Club was forced to close its facilities in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Wilson immediately began receiving frantic messages from teens. They wanted to know whether the annual 9-Foot All-Star Basketball Tournament was still on. The weekend-long spring event is a teen favorite. Hoops are lowered from the regulation 10 feet so youth b-ballers can play with the flair of the pros. Teens can take part in a slam dunk contest and a three-point shoot-out. (The Club will reschedule the event as soon as it’s safe, said Wilson.)

The Club’s winter basketball league is open to everyone, with an emphasis, like all the Club’s leagues, on the basic skills of the sport, fair play, teamwork, healthy lifestyles and fun. High school coaches contact the Club to refer youth who don’t make the school team. Club staff invite those players to join the Club’s league. No one warms the bench, either: In all sports, everyone gets a chance to play every position, regardless of skill level.

Staff also incorporate opportunities for youth to get active in the Club’s program day. In Workout Warrior,

for example, participants rotate through a series of workout stations, switching like musical chairs when the overhead music changes. Staff play fun, “old-school” songs in the gym to encourage more kids to join in, said Wilson. Staff serve healthy snacks and chat with youth about fitness, nutrition and their own power to make healthy choices.

Club offerings for teens help them beat the odds against staying active as they get older. The Club hosts late-night events like glow-in-the-dark dodgeball, and the adjacent city skate park stays open to 11 p.m. During the school year, the Club even provides P.E. classes for home-schooled youth twice a week. “It’s a recreational mecca,” said V.P. of Operations Derek DeBoer, and the Club works hard to make sure it offers something for everyone.



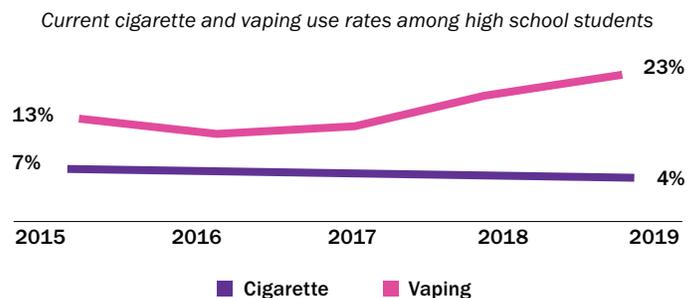
# Preventing Substance Use

## VAPING

### TRENDS AMONG YOUTH

Vaping has been steadily growing as a major health concern for youth. Vaping is inhaling an aerosol containing nicotine, chemicals and other flavorings that are created by an electronic battery-operated cigarette.<sup>90</sup> From 2011 to 2019, past-30-day cigarette use decreased from 4% to 2% among middle school students and from 12% to 4% for high school students.<sup>91,92</sup> Yet in just two years, from 2017 to 2019, the percentage of high schoolers reporting vaping in the past 30 days has almost doubled (12% vs. 23%).<sup>93</sup> This trend is especially concerning since vaping rates had decreased between 2015 and 2016.

### Cigarette use is declining while vaping rates are rising among teens.



### REASONS FOR VAPING AMONG TEENS

Rates of past-month vaping are higher than rates for the use of any other substance, including alcohol and marijuana.<sup>94</sup> The most common reasons given for vaping are “to experiment” (61%), “to relax or relieve tension” (38%), or “have a good time with my friends” (38%).<sup>95</sup> The percentage of students who stated that they are vaping to



“relax or relieve tension” has increased by nearly one-third since 2018,<sup>96</sup> indicating that more teens are choosing vaping as a coping strategy to relieve stress.

Alarming, the percentage of high school seniors who indicated that they are “hooked on vaping” from 2017 to 2019 has quadrupled. Most vaping aerosols contain a quantity of nicotine that can be addictive, although the exact amounts have been difficult to determine.<sup>97</sup> JUUL, a manufacturer of commonly used e-cigarettes, indicated that each of their vaping pods contain as much nicotine as 20 packs of cigarettes.<sup>98</sup> Decades of research has shown that nicotine is harmful to adolescent brain development and increases the risk of future addiction to other drugs.<sup>99</sup>

**CLUBS’ VAPING PREVENTION RESPONSE**

BGCA’s “Vaping Prevention Resource Guide” identifies the key features of vaping, signs of use and tips on how to talk to youth about vaping. The updated SMART Moves substance use prevention suite of program resources utilizes a health promotion and trauma-informed approach that encourages healthy decision making, perseverance and coping skills. The suite includes a health promotion

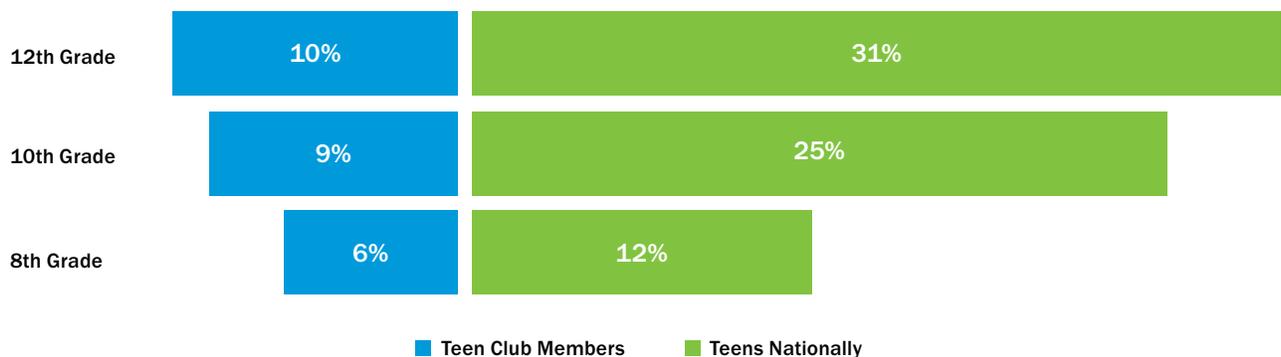
core program, an emotional wellness program, family engagement resources, and a vaping and nicotine prevention module that build these skills.

Clubs have partnered with schools, local organizations and state legislators to raise awareness of and make presentations about the harmful effects of vaping. Statewide anti-tobacco councils comprised of Club and non-Club teens have created tools and strategies for preventing vaping among youth. Several Clubs have also expanded their existing substance use prevention programs to explicitly address vaping and create more opportunities for youth to practice healthy decision-making.

“Nationally, 10th and 12th graders were three times as likely to have vaped in the past month compared to Club members in those grades.

**Club teens are less likely to vape compared to teens nationally.**

*Current vaping use in the past 30 days among teens*



## CLUB MEMBERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO VAPE

Boys & Girls Club teens overall are more likely to have abstained from vaping compared to teens nationally.<sup>100</sup> Nationally, eighth graders were twice as likely, and 10th and 12th graders were three times as likely, to have vaped in the past month compared to Club members in those grades (see graph on previous page).



## OPIOID MISUSE

### THE IMPACT OF OPIOID MISUSE

The opioid epidemic has had a devastating impact on youth and families. Although the rates of prescription opioid misuse among youth have continued to decline significantly over the past five years,<sup>101</sup> in 2016, 4% of youth ages 12 to 17 reported opioid misuse. This percentage doubled among young adults ages 18 to 25.<sup>102</sup> In 2017, 11 million people ages 12 and older reported opioid misuse.<sup>103</sup> Youth stated that opioids have “become harder to obtain than in the past,”<sup>104</sup> which may have contributed to the declining rates of use.

Opioid-related deaths affect entire communities. In 2018, nearly 47,000 youth and adults died from opioid-related overdoses. The CDC estimates that for every overdose death, there have been 119 emergency room visits and 22 admissions into treatment facilities.<sup>105</sup> The number of opioid-related deaths is six times the number since 1999,<sup>106</sup> with the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States reporting the highest numbers of deaths.<sup>107</sup> Approximately 15% of all Boys & Girls Clubs are located in these regions, serving over 600,000 youth and their families.

Having a substance user in the home places adolescents at a greater risk for substance use.<sup>108</sup> Nearly 8 million youth under age 18 live with an adult who uses drugs.<sup>109</sup> Approximately half of youth ages 12 to 17 reporting opioid misuse indicated that they were given opioids by a relative or friend.<sup>110</sup> These environments also tend to be unstable for youth, with adult substance users being three times more likely to neglect their children and abuse them physically or sexually. This trauma puts youth at an increased risk for depression, anxiety and other mental health issues.<sup>111</sup>

### CLUB OPIOID PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Clubs have utilized skill-building approaches from the “Opioid and Substance Use Prevention Resource Guide,” which includes emotional check-ins and activities that help youth identify and process their emotions. Additionally, Clubs have implemented programs for youth affected by opioid use in their home, such as witnessing an overdose or family separation. Youth are able to form support systems with peers who may be similarly affected. More Clubs are training their staff on topics such as adverse childhood experiences, mental health first aid, and ways to calm disruptive behaviors, increasing their capacity to support affected youth. The opioid prevention learning community includes staff from more than 50 participating Clubs who foster and sustain these strategies.

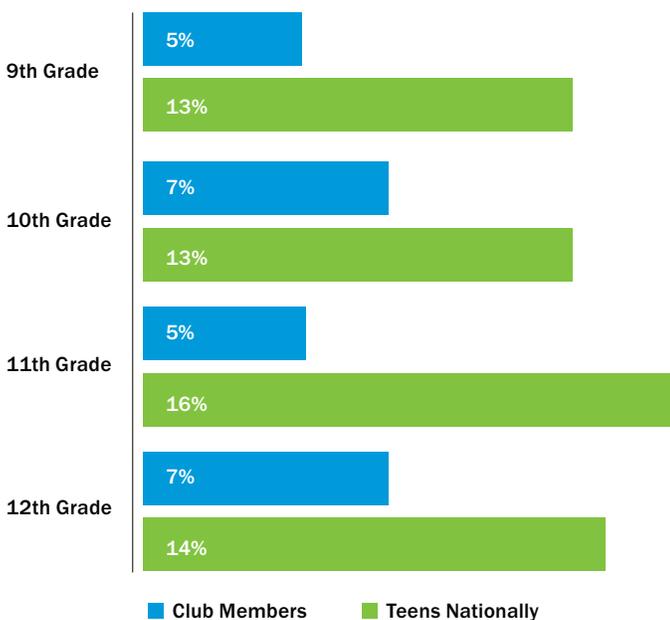


### CLUB MEMBERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO MISUSE OPIOIDS

Boys & Girls Club teens have lower lifetime rates of opioid misuse than teens nationally (6% vs. 14%).<sup>112</sup> This pattern holds true across grades. Ninth and 12th graders nationally are twice as likely to misuse opioids and 11th graders nationally are three times more likely to misuse opioids as Club teens.<sup>113</sup>

#### Club teens are less likely to have ever tried opioids compared to teens nationally.

*Lifetime opioid misuse among high school students*



### CLUB APPROACHES TO PREVENTING SUBSTANCE USE THROUGH SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Protective factors such as creating a safe, nurturing environment where youth can develop positive relationships have been shown to reduce the risk of drug use among

youth.<sup>114</sup> Clubs provide such spaces and enable youth to build protective skills, like stress management and problem-solving, to make positive health decisions.

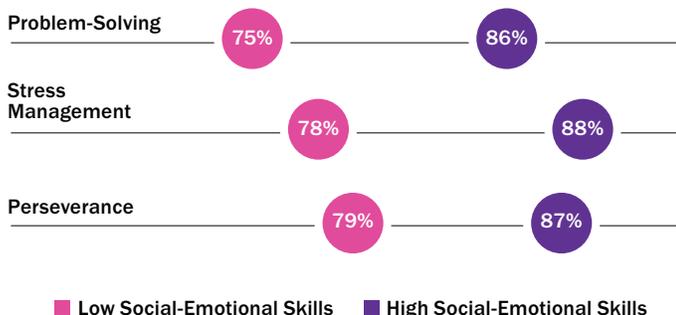
Clubs integrate mindfulness activities into their programming, such as creating “Zen Rooms” with soft lighting and calming toys and activities where youth can regulate their emotions and relieve stress and anxiety. Other activities include engaging youth in scenarios where they practice solving problems and modeling healthy behaviors. By cultivating these skills, youth become better equipped to cope with mental health issues that commonly occur with drug use and exposure.<sup>115</sup>

Club mentoring programs also encourage positive peer and adult relationships and foster emotional wellness and perseverance. At the Boys & Girls Club of the Eastern Panhandle in West Virginia, mentors in the Handle With Care Mentoring Program alert staff when youth have lived through a traumatic event in their home so they can help them cope with that experience.

More than 1,400 Clubs receive federal funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to support implementation of holistic mentoring programs that can help decrease youth substance use and delinquency. Clubs use best practices to mentor youth, such as leveraging their strengths, building positive attitudes and emotions, and having a substance use prevention specialist implement evidence-based prevention programming throughout the Club day. An audit of these sites has shown that having dedicated staff has been the most effective method of integrating substance use prevention practices into the Club.

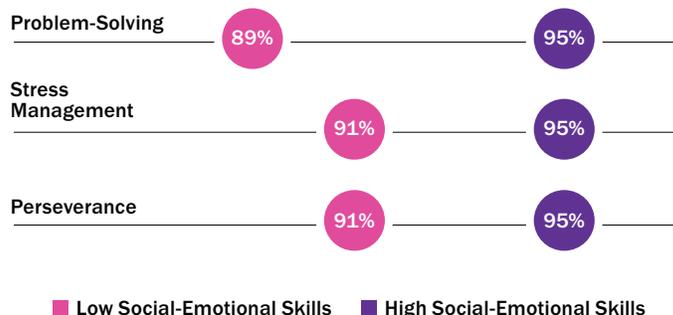
**Club teens with strong social-emotional skills are more likely to abstain from vaping.**

*Lifetime abstention rates among Club teens*



**Club teens with strong social-emotional skills are more likely to abstain from opioid misuse.**

*Lifetime abstention rates among Club teens*



**CLUB TEENS WITH STRONG SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS ARE LESS LIKELY TO USE SUBSTANCES**

Clubs help prevent substance use by enabling youth to develop key skills that serve as protective factors against drug use. Youth reporting higher social-emotional skills have lower rates of substance use, including vaping and opioid misuse.<sup>116</sup> NYOI data show the same holds true for Club teens (see graphs above). Vaping abstention rates are higher for Club teens who report strong problem-solving, stress management and perseverance skills, while Club teens with lower social-emotional skills have lower vaping abstention rates. For example, 86% of Club teens who report high problem-solving skills are abstaining from vaping, whereas 75% of Club teens who report lower problem-solving skills are abstaining from vaping. The pattern is similar for abstention from opioid misuse.

BGCA observes the same pattern across other substances commonly used by youth. Club teens who report stronger perseverance, stress management and problem-solving skills are less likely to use vaping products and any tobacco, misuse opioids or consume alcohol.

# Building Emotional Wellness

## MAJOR STRESSORS AMONG TEENS AND THEIR IMPACT

Stress among teens continues to rise. The annual Stress in America™ survey found that since 2013, teens have reported higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression than adults.<sup>117</sup> Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Boys & Girls Clubs teens reported “when something important goes wrong in my life, I just can’t stop worrying about it.” In 2017, 13% of U.S. adolescents and teens aged 12 to 17 had at least one major depressive episode during the past year.<sup>118</sup> Diagnoses of anxiety or depression among young people aged 6 to 17 have continued to climb since 2003.<sup>119</sup>

Teens identify anxiety, depression, bullying and substance use as major stressors among their peers.<sup>120</sup> This is especially prevalent among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) teens, who are twice as likely to have been bullied online (27% vs. 13%) or in school



(33% vs. 17%) than heterosexual teens. Consequently, more than half (63%) of LGBTQ teens have experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and are over three times more likely to have seriously considered attempting suicide, made a suicide plan or attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth.<sup>121</sup>



Additionally, mass shootings, rises in suicide rates and family separation are top issues of concern among teens.<sup>122</sup> Among Club teens, 62% report being concerned about mental health issues, 45% about substance use and violence, and 39% about diversity, equity and inclusion.<sup>123</sup> Teens nationally also identify racism, community violence and unemployment as negatively affecting their well-being.<sup>124</sup> Those who report experiencing discrimination have higher levels of stress hormones, blood pressure and obesity,<sup>125</sup> with greater odds of experiencing depression and engaging in substance use.<sup>126,127</sup>

COVID-19 further impaired teens' emotional wellness. A 2020 national survey commissioned by 4-H found that 70% of teens surveyed during the pandemic struggled with their mental health, with 55% experiencing anxiety, 45% feeling excessive stress, and 43% experiencing depression due to the pandemic. The top two sources of their anxiety and depression were worrying about school and the impact of COVID-19 on their future. The majority of respondents (64%) also believed that COVID-19 would have a long-lasting effect on their generation's mental health.<sup>128</sup> Depression and anxiety adversely impact healthy development and well-being. Young people living with depression have an increased risk for suicide and substance use.<sup>129</sup> Depression can have negative effects on academic performance and peer and family relationships. Long-term chronic stress can lead to physical health problems such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease.<sup>130</sup>

## CLUB APPROACHES TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

Social-emotional skills build resilience, which is the ability to cope with life's stressors. Resilience emphasizes strengths such as positive relationships, coping strategies and emotional regulation that help promote wellness.<sup>131,132</sup> Individuals with strong resilience have lower stress levels and fewer depressive symptoms.<sup>133</sup> Quality out-of-school-time programming has been shown to positively enhance social-emotional outcomes.<sup>134</sup> Clubs provide teens with positive experiences, relationships and environments that foster resilience through dedicated staff implementing skill-building activities, programs and practices that support emotional wellness.

Emotional wellness activities, for example, help teens identify how their bodies react when they are stressed and learn deep breathing and visualization techniques to reduce their anxiety. BGCA's Be There grief and bereavement

initiative provides training, strategies and activities to help Club staff implement best practices to support youth who have experienced life-altering traumatic losses such as death, divorce or community violence. Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor in Michigan changed its entire culture when staff created 600 Safe Street, both a physical location within the Club and a method of staff and youth interaction. A dedicated staff member facilitates well-being programming for all youth during the Club day and manages the space, where youth can go to practice coping strategies when they are having a bad day, need help processing their emotions, or just need to talk.

Through this approach, both youth and staff have learned safe and healing practices to address trauma. As youth learn new skills such as problem-solving, stress management and perseverance, they can reflect on what they've learned, its importance and how to apply these skills to other areas of their lives. Reflections embedded throughout Club programming give youth the opportunity to identify and use these skills during the entire day.



Clubs have also developed specific social-emotional programming targeting issues that concern teens. Although resilience helps teens navigate through life's stressors, systemic inequities exist that can exacerbate their anxiety and affect their wellness. Boys & Girls Club of Tracy in

California created a teen hotline and podcast series where teens can call in and express their concerns to supportive adults. Several Clubs have hosted town hall meetings, listening sessions and community forums to create specific teen strategies that address emotional wellness.

### **THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL INTERVENTIONS ON EMOTIONAL WELLNESS**

Interventions that explicitly build social-emotional skills have been shown to have a positive impact. An analysis of school-based interventions found that students who participated in a social-emotional program reported higher emotional wellness and graduation rates than students who never participated in one. Additionally, students who participated in a social-emotional program had lower rates of engaging in risky behaviors six and 18 months after their program ended, compared to their peers who never participated in one.<sup>135</sup>

BGCA applied this research in developing the new SMART Moves: Emotional Wellness program. The program builds the social-emotional skills (self-regulation, impulse control and stress management) that are most linked to helping youth avoid negative thought patterns and behaviors. The program targets elementary- and middle-school Club youth to help them acquire tools for self-management and coping at an earlier age and be able to use them during their teen years and throughout adulthood.

### **THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING ON CLUB MEMBERS**

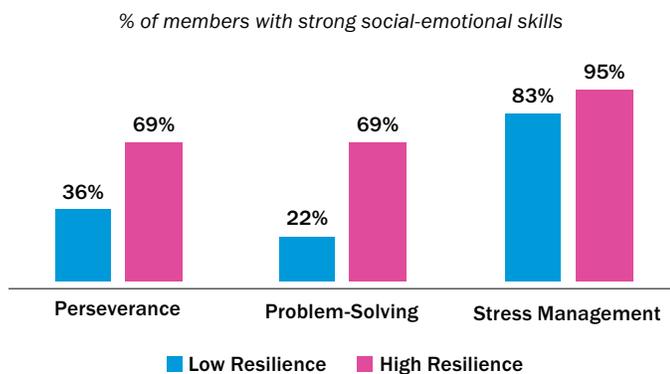
Individuals who develop healthy social-emotional skills such as perseverance and problem-solving during childhood are more likely to make positive decisions regarding alcohol and substance use and are able to better navigate physical and mental health challenges later in life.<sup>136</sup> These skills build resilience. Teens with strong resilience skills attending



4-H programs, for instance, had more confidence to address their mental health concerns and utilize healthy coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, NYOI data shows that Boys & Girls Club members with strong resilience are more likely to report higher perseverance, problem-solving and stress management skills than Club members with low resilience (see graph below).

Social-emotional skill building is an essential ingredient in the positive experiences, relationships and environments that young people need for their healthy development. NYOI data shows that perseverance, stress management and problem-solving skills are the strongest predictors of Club members abstaining from alcohol, vaping, marijuana and opioid misuse. The more resilient Club members are, the more likely they are to avoid unhealthy coping behaviors. Strong social-emotional skills are linked to positive academic success outcomes, readiness for post-secondary education, character and leadership development and increased participation in physical activity. Boys & Girls Clubs provide youth with opportunities to develop skills in a safe, nurturing environment that enables them to flourish.

**Club members with strong resilience report higher social-emotional skills.**



“ We tell them we’re helping them build a self-care toolkit. When they feel stress, they can use these tools; they don’t have to turn to substance abuse. – Monica Gallant, Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley

**Club’s Social-Emotional Programs Treat Trauma of Opioid Epidemic**

From mass shootings to racism to social media and bullying, many factors encroach upon the mental health and well-being of today’s teens. In Milford, N.H., it was the opioid crisis that galvanized Club leaders around the need to provide emotional wellness programming for young people.

Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley had long been part of a grassroots coalition to prevent teen substance abuse. Around 2012, Club staff began hearing about the effects of the opioid epidemic on children, recalled Monica Gallant, the organization’s director of prevention services. “Club members were starting to lose parents and older siblings.”

Even more young people – 27% of students, according to the 2017 Souhegan Valley Youth Risk Behavior Survey – live with someone with a substance use disorder. That can make life chaotic for youth, and ultimately increases their own risk of substance abuse.

For young people affected by the opioid crisis, the Souhegan Valley Club offers respite in the form of monthly Children’s Resiliency Retreats held at the Clubhouse and an idyllic outdoor space in an adjacent park. There are cooking classes, mindfulness activities, arts, music therapy and ropes courses. Participants learn about feelings, coping skills and healthy responses. “We tell them we’re helping them build a self-care toolkit,” said Gallant. “When they feel stress, they can use these tools; they don’t have to turn to substance abuse.”

The retreats are part of the Club’s comprehensive array of prevention programs working to show young people they can break the cycle of substance abuse and choose a healthier path. For high school senior Abby F., such a path led all the way to the 2020 New Hampshire State Youth of the Year title. Abby chairs the Club’s YES (Youth Empowerment and Service) Team, a teen group dedicated to preventing substance abuse and promoting mental health.

YES Team members conduct focus groups with teens in the community so that their concerns can inform the group’s projects. The team has convened youth summits, community health fairs and advocacy events. Projects are “youth-led, adult-guided,” said CEO Michael Goodwin. It’s an important elevation of youth voice, he explained. “They’re on the front lines, living it every day.” The group is planning a vaping education summit and “take back” event, which would allow teens to turn in vaping devices, no questions asked.

The arrival of COVID-19 forced the Club to shut down for the spring of 2020. Doors re-opened for summer programming on June 1.

But even after 400 hours of cleaning, training and prepping, staff sensed their pandemic response was missing something. Club youth were expressing feelings of anxiety and isolation after three months at home. Some kids felt excluded and even bullied. They felt like no one wanted to hear about their feelings, said Gallant. “As a Club and a community, we’ve spent the last several years learning about trauma and its effects on kids. We realized we needed to help these kids develop coping skills” to deal with pandemic-related trauma.

During the school year, the Club runs Positive Action, a social-emotional learning program that promotes problem-solving, good leadership and healthy communication skills. In 2020, it became a summer necessity. Each week, a group of 60 Club members learned methods, inspired by a different epidemic, for coping with the trauma of the COVID-19 crisis. In a particularly sweet example, youth penned verse about blackberries for a “mindful poetry writing” workshop developed by New Hampshire Poet Laureate Alexandria Peary for child survivors of the opioid crisis.





# Conclusion

Boys & Girls Clubs are more than just safe places to go when school is out. Clubs relentlessly focus on the conditions necessary for young people to learn, grow and thrive: positive experiences, environments and relationships. Because of this, outcomes data from Clubs affirm that Club youth graduate with a plan for the future, become leaders and change agents, and make decisions that promote their health and wellness.

- ◆ 75% of Club members ages 12 to 17 from low-income families report receiving mostly As and Bs, compared to 67% of their peers nationally.
- ◆ Club members in eighth, 10th and 12th grades volunteer at significantly higher rates than their peers nationally.
- ◆ Nationally, 10th and 12th graders are three times as likely to have vaped in the past month compared to Club members in those grades.



The United States faces many challenges. As postsecondary education costs continue to rise, Clubs must support young people in pursuing their studies after high school. As skill and diversity gaps persist in the workforce, Clubs must ensure that all young people have opportunities to develop and practice skills such as inquiry, analysis and problem solving. Clubs must develop young leaders who can exercise their influence and change narratives to include all people. Clubs must instill in young people the lifelong habits that result in physical and emotional wellness. The future of the nation will require a generation of skilled, adaptive, nimble leaders to make advancements across sectors and industries.

In response to ever-changing community contexts and recognizing that the experiences of youth are increasingly complex, Boys & Girls Clubs are prioritizing the following:

- ◆ **Safety and Wellness** – Every young person feels safe and included, and experiences social, emotional and physical wellness.
- ◆ **Equity and Inclusion** – Every young person has access to high-quality youth development experiences and real-world opportunities.
- ◆ **Readiness** – Every young person is equipped with the skills and experiences that lead to success in school, work and life.

Youth, families and communities need their local Boys & Girls Clubs now more than ever. Club professionals and volunteers believe that every young person in the nation is resilient and has what it takes to build a great future. Boys & Girls Clubs will continue to serve as partners with youth, families and communities. Boys & Girls Clubs' commitment to young people and to positive youth development will not waiver.

“ Club professionals and volunteers believe every young person in the nation is resilient and has what it takes to build a great future.



# About Boys & Girls Clubs of America

## Our Reach

Boys & Girls Clubs provide a safe, affordable place for children and teens during critical out-of-school time. Clubs offer life-changing programs and services to youth across the nation and on U.S. military installations worldwide.

Boys & Girls Clubs serve

**4.6 million**

young people, a diverse population ranging from ages 6 to 18.



**4,738**

Clubs are located in schools, public housing, on Native lands, in rural areas and inner cities – wherever youth need us most.

**58%**

of Club members are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches, an important indicator of low-income status, compared to

**52%**

of public-school students nationally.<sup>138</sup>

On a typical day,

**467,000**

children and teens attend a Boys & Girls Club.

**68,000**

adult staff work to fulfill our youth development mission, supported by

**457,000**

volunteers.



# Endnotes

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