



Social, Emotional, and Physical Well-Being for all Youth

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of depression and anxiety were rising among teens with two-thirds of young people having experienced at least one traumatic event by age 16, putting them at an increased risk for physical and mental health problems, academic and behavior challenges, and decreased later life outcomes.

According to the 2021 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory *Protecting Youth Mental Health*, "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, exposure to community violence, and living in under-resourced or racially segregated neighborhoods can undermine a child's sense of safety, stability, bonding and well-being."



 **Every dollar invested** in Boys & Girls Clubs **returns \$9.60** in current and future earnings and cost-savings to their communities.

Due to restrictions and disruptions caused by the pandemic, young people experienced higher instances of food insecurity, housing insecurity, isolation and access to vital mental health services leading to these rising rates of anxiety and depression. COVID-19 severely impacted youth experiences at home, school, in their communities, and among their peers.

- In a January 2021 national survey of parents of teens aged 13 to 18, **nearly half (46%)** of parents said they had noticed a **new or worsening mental health condition** for their teen since the pandemic's start.¹
- In a study by PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs and WellBeings, teens said **mental health is their top-ranked concern for the future**, with **50%** saying the pandemic made their mental health worse.²
- A spring 2021 national survey of high school students showed they were **struggling with mental health declines** and **increased disconnection from peers and adults**, with disproportionate impacts on young women and nonbinary and Latino youth.
- **One in six** youth experienced food insecurity in 2021. (Feeding America).



These findings make the work of community youth providers like Boys & Girls Clubs more important than ever. Through environments that are physically and emotionally safe, Boys & Girls Club staff create supportive relationships with youth, opportunities to try new things with high expectations for their success and recognize their growth and effort while also supporting their physical wellness through access to fun physical activities and nutritious meals and snacks.

The need for these programs is at an all-time high. Congress must prioritize the social, emotional, and physical well-being of our nation's youth by ensuring all young people can feel nutritionally, emotionally, and physically secure and supported within their families and their community-at-large. Lawmakers must respond to these urgent needs to ensure America's youth have the support they need to achieve a great future.

¹ CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health. 2021. <https://mottpoll.org/reports/how-pandemic-has-impacted-teen-mental-health>

² WellBeings. 2020. https://wellbeings.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Well-Beings-Youth-Mental-Health-Survey-Summary_Oct2020.pdf

Nutritional Well-Being: Every young person should have access to healthy, affordable meals and snacks and be equipped to make healthy decisions resulting in positive social, emotional, and physical well-being.

Boys & Girls Clubs of LA Harbor, California has been providing nutritionally balanced and weekend-long meal packages to their Club families and the communities they serve, with 35,000 meals distributed each weekend. As previous operators of both the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the Club was well-positioned to pivot their traditional meal program operations and scale quickly to also leverage other federal support programs and partnerships, such as the USDA's box program and an existing relationship with the LA Food Bank. To provide a wide range of items and the healthiest options possible, the Club utilized a variety of sources to acquire the foods necessary to best balance their Weekend Wellness packages.



Policy Ask

We ask Congress to expand the capacity of Boys & Girls Clubs and other non-school sponsors to serve healthy meals and snacks year-round by incorporating the Summer Meals Act of 2021 (S. 1170/H.R. 783) in any reauthorization package of federal child nutrition programs.

Emotional Well-Being: Every young person should have the opportunity to heal from any Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and ensure that they can achieve their dreams.

Through strategic partnerships with Clark County and the State of Nevada, **Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Nevada** is now offering mental health and counseling services. Licensed therapists provide trauma-informed care and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to youth, along with group, one-on-one and family counseling services. Focused on managing emotions and healthy coping strategies, sessions are co-facilitated by licensed clinicians and Club staff. This strategically provides youth with a familiar, supportive adult and allows staff to reinforce lessons during regular Club time. Delivering services through the Club provides easy access for families, eliminating the burden on caregivers to find time and transportation to get youth to and from appointments. Recent approval as a Medicaid provider allows members access to services for no out-of-pocket cost while providing financial sustainability of the program.



Policy Ask

We ask Congress to ensure the inclusion of youth-serving community-based organizations in any mental health, addiction, and trauma-related legislative package to serve young people and their families where they are and begin the critical work of healing and mitigating the longer-term harm of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Physical Well-Being: Every young person should feel safe and secure in their community.

The **Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley**, New Hampshire created a Club youth committee called "*Community Action for Safe Teens*," where youth impacted by violence, addiction, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences lead a peer-to-peer support group program to provide a safe place to discuss key topics and build trusting, nurturing relationships essential for their personal growth and development. The committee hosts frequent opportunities throughout the year for family engagement and has hosted an anti-bullying event and a middle school youth summit that featured panel discussions on gender identity, substance misuse, suicide, and healthy relationships. The committee also works with the local medical community and Dartmouth College Hospital to conduct outreach at local recovery centers and to create a referral system to the Club for supportive programming and services.



Policy Ask

We ask Congress to support the full implementation of the Community Violence Intervention funding included in the Build Back Better Act and ensure that critical resources are provided to youth-serving community-based organizations who are vital in preventing, reducing, and mitigating the longer-term harm of community violence.