



The City of Knoxville Spring Break & Summer Opportunity Youth Grants

2022
Impact Report

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From the Director

The City of Knoxville Office of Community Safety is pleased to have partnered with community-based organizations through the Spring Break Opportunity Youth micro-grants and Summer Opportunity Youth grants programs. We recognize the value of engaging young people and creating networks of support. This is especially true for young people who are at the highest risk for involvement in violence. Creating positive networks of support, providing meaningful experiences, and empowering young people to explore their interests is essential to reducing risk factors for violence. Breaks from school are ideal times to connect opportunities for employment or programming with disconnected young people. Experiences during Spring and Summer breaks can be bridges to continued participation in supportive programs and services.

We appreciate the youth, families, staff, volunteers, and community members who participated in the 2022 Spring Break Opportunity Youth micro-grant and Summer Opportunity Youth grant programs. In its inaugural effort, the Spring Break Opportunity Youth micro-grant program served approximately 120 youths. The Summer Opportunity Youth grant program, in its second year, served approximately 220 youths. Organizations engaged young people through programming, community service opportunities, internships, and other activities. We are grateful for the support of everyone involved in these programs and look forward to the lasting impact they will have.



LaKenya Middlebrook
Chief Community Safety Officer, City of Knoxville



"Violence flourishes in communities where many people have been stripped of the social supports and opportunities that they need to thrive and where expectations of personal security and a meaningful future have been systematically thwarted or still-born." ¹

— Elliot Currie

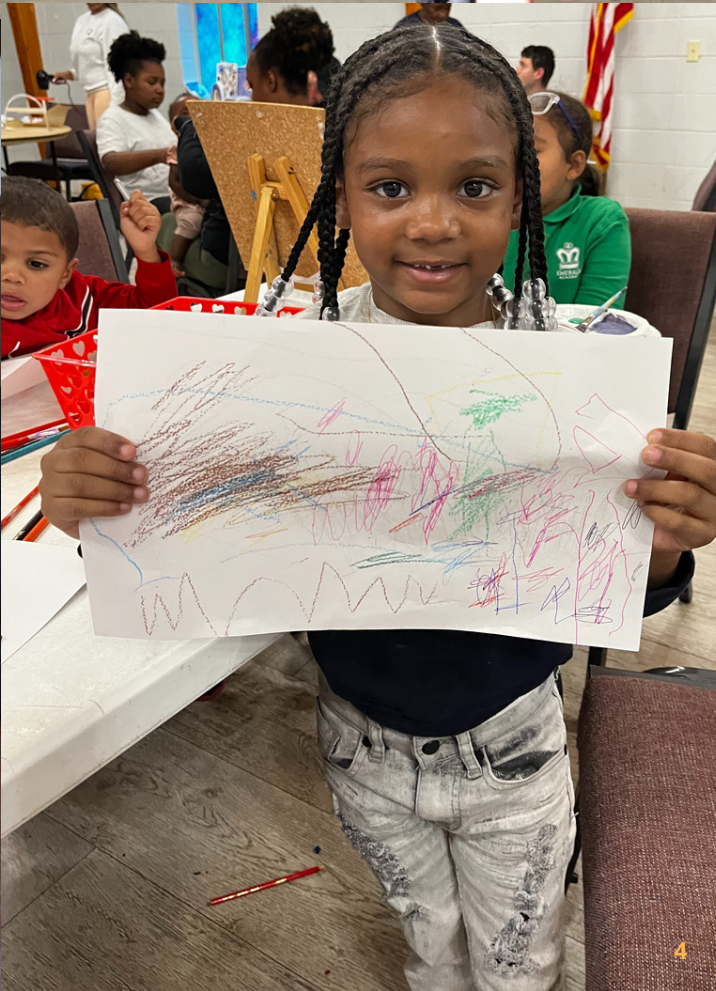
Introduction

Violence, including that perpetrated by young people, is a pernicious problem for many communities, particularly those facing historically high levels of concentrated disadvantages and disinvestment. To effectively address youth violence and establish and maintain peace, communities need opportunities for engagement.

Connecting young people to positive networks and engaging them in opportunities associated with personal, community, and social development can begin the process of dismantling barriers to success, expanding perceptions of what is possible, focusing on community strengths and assets, and ultimately preventing violence in the community.² The City of Knoxville recognizes that breaks in activities such as school and recreational programming provide opportunities to engage with Opportunity Youth and provide expanded experiences that may not be feasible during regular programming hours. The Office of Community Safety defines Opportunity Youth as young people who are specifically identified as being at the highest violent crime.

Today, youth across the United States are at the highest of becoming victims and participants of gun violence. Between the ages of 15 to 24, youth are 23 times more likely to be killed with guns than those in other high-income countries.³ In an average year, more than 35,000 15- to 24-year-olds are shot and killed or wounded in the US—58% of these deaths are by gun homicide, and 46% of these injuries are by gun assault.⁴ Violence in cities is often cyclical and the trauma that comes with it can lead youth to engage in violence. The same youth who are victimized by violence are often also perpetrators. In cities during 2019, youth under 25 made up 42% of arrests for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, 52% of arrests for robbery, 27% of arrests for aggravated assault, and 39% of arrests for weapons offenses.⁵

Community Organizations throughout Knoxville that received the Spring Break or Summer Opportunity Youth Grants (SBOYG/ SOYG) created opportunities serving as a first line of defense for Knoxville's Opportunity Youth, reminding communities that its Opportunity Youth—primarily Black, brown, and low-income children—deserve the opportunity to safely play and have fun alongside other children as a means of preventing violence.



Participating Organizations

Emerald Youth Foundation

Served Opportunity Youth through their Calling and Career programming, which operates 4 centers for high school students and young adults located in East Knoxville, Mechanicsville, Lonsdale and Oakwood/Lincoln Park. The centers specifically targeted youth in neighborhoods that are disproportionately affected by violence, where youth are more disconnected from community programs and are more at-risk of falling behind academically, involvement in the criminal system, and experiencing other negative outcomes. Programming included academic support, post-secondary education and training, college tours, workshops for career planning, STEM opportunities, and physical and mental well-being.

Gold Key Access

Consulted with church groups, middle and high school guidance counselors, staff at the YWCA and E.V. Davidson after school program, and the Knox County Detention Center to identify 12 youth between the ages of 11-15 who were most at risk of violence. Youth worked with either a senior citizen community, daycare, or local retail store, providing community service. Youth also did activities such as light housekeeping.

Karate Five Association

Partnered with the Boys & Girls Club of the TN Valley's Director of Projects to combine potential participants from their local facilities with students. The Boys & Girls Club on Irwin Street in Knoxville directly supports Opportunity Youth in their programs from neighborhoods where youth face violent and dangerous issues and where able to provide suggestions for participants. Programming included community service, speaker series with community members and government stakeholders such as law enforcement, and learning karate skills.

MUSE Knoxville

This grant helped extend MUSE's existing Muse Apprenticeship Program serving Vine Middle School, Whittle Springs Middle School, Fulton High School, and Austin East High School Students. Existing students in the program have been disproportionately impacted by violence and other indicators that increase the risk of becoming a victim of violent crime or perpetrating violent crime. Programming included engagement in leadership development activities (i.e., interview skills, mock interviews, resume and cover letter writing, organizational planning skills, strengths and weaknesses assessments, stress management and coping skills strategies) based on participants interests and needs. Students also participated in a creating a community-give-back event for the East Knoxville community.

My Daughter's Journey

Sought out referrals for youth identified as high risk from Knox County Juvenile Court Restorative Justice Program, YWCA Phyllis Wheatley Center, local high school guidance counselors, school principals, and parents and guardians. Programming included giving youth a unique opportunity to explore and develop their skills and style as a leader by connecting participants with the community through community opportunities. Participants also developed a project of their choosing that future program participants would have the chance to participate in.

SEED

Identified Opportunity Youth by partnering with schools in East and South Knoxville with a large risk population as well as utilized their social media platforms and website to speak to parents and family members that are assisted through SEEDS weekly rental and utility assistance program. Programming for participants included allowing them to work as community engagement specialists where they helped with data entry of survey results, answered phones, and assisted with enrolling individuals with the organization's renter and utility assistant program. Some participants also worked in the organization's edible forest where they gardened and learned about healthy eating and food sustainability.

The Bottom

Worked with educators in the Knoxville community and conducted outreach on social media, including parenting groups, to identify Opportunity Youths. Programming from The Bottom for participants included supporting creatives and aspiring creatives. Participants took part in art workshops and projects, and were encouraged to incorporate the Knoxville community as their muse for their expression as they met with artists and community leaders. The program helped Opportunity Youth explore how to expand their self-determined creative goals all while learning the Bottom's community engagement model that centers arts and culture.

YWCA

Identified Opportunity Youth formally through assessments and informally through relationship-central staffing strategies. Most of the youth that have participated in the organization's school and summer programs at the Phyllis Wheatley Center in the past two years have been Opportunity Youth. They additionally referred to their network of partners (community members, school counselors, churches, and civic organizations) to identify and recruit Opportunity Youth. Programming included providing Opportunity Youth between the ages 14-18 internship opportunities who would have not qualified for other work skills programs traditionally offered to individuals with exceptional academic and service records. The internship offered guided service learning, hands-on work, and life skills job and work skills shadowing, and participating in community service projects.

Canvas Can Do Miracles

Identified Opportunity Youth through past relationships and previous services focused on supporting underserved communities throughout Knoxville. As an organization that offers free art classes to communities and individuals with substance abuse issues, programming for youth participants included teaching art basics as well as engagement with a healthy artistic process to help creatively process coping with the emotional concerns around violence.

Shora Foundation

Identified Opportunity Youth living in and around the organization, particularly in local schools through marketing to students via school administration, teachers, and word of mouth. Programming for students was centered around youth entrepreneurship. Many youths engage in criminal activity due to being economically challenged, as such, programming emphasized that youth can learn about business and income as early as 10 years old.

Two Bikes

Dedicated to expanding access to the benefits of riding a bike in Knoxville, Tennessee, Two Bikes focused on programming that supported youth workforce development. Opportunity Youth participants were offered both mechanical and sales training during The Bike School over the summer, allowing Opportunity Youth to engage in skills that will be useful for future job opportunities.

Drums Up Guns Down

Partnered with Freedom Village of Home (East TN Freedom Schools, Vine Middle Magnet School, the YWCA Phillis Wheatley Center, and Austin East to recruit students from zip codes with students at the highest risk of violence and would also identify as Opportunity Youths. Programming from Drums Up Guns Down consisted of teaching West African Drum and Dance to promote healing, enrichment, and community. Programming provided participants with a space for them to be creative, leadership skills, and learn a skill within the arts.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

Identified Opportunity Youth through an application component for programming. Big Brothers Big Sisters selected 2 Opportunity Youth applicants and provided them with an internship opportunity. Opportunity Youth interns assisted in planning summer activities and engagement events for their peers enrolled in other Big Brothers Big Sisters programming and those waiting to be matched with mentoring programming. Participants learned more about non-profit programming as well as engaging their peers.

At a Glance

The spring and summer programs successfully achieved their goal of providing engagement activities, job opportunities, and professional development to Opportunity Youth throughout the Knoxville community. Selected organizations created unique opportunities for youth during the 2022 spring and summer breaks when some might have otherwise been disconnected from support and community, as a result potentially turning to violence.

As the spring and summer break programs ended, youth were segued to after-school programming or employment either within or outside the organization they were engaged with. With the City of Knoxville's help, the programs created a bridge that picked up where school breaks left off, successfully supporting and engaging Opportunity Youth until they started back up in school.

Spring Break

- 9 community-based organizations received funding to provide spring break engagement opportunities for Opportunity Youth.
- Programming began on or about March 14th, 2022, and closed by March 18th, 2022.
- **120 youths were served** during the 2022 spring break.
- 66% of participants were between the ages of 15-17 years old
- **Black/ African American youth made up 70% of participants.**
- 62% of youth lived in a household where the household income was less than \$26,999; only 37% made above \$27,000.
- **114 of 120 youths reported Opportunity Youth status**, representing 95% of participants.
 - 2% reported gang/ crew/ or group affiliation, 10% reported having some juvenile or criminal system involvement, 60% reported being disconnected from school, work, or community organizations, 7% reported being a previous crime victim, and 27% reported having a close friend or family member shot in the last year.

Summer Break

- 11 community-based organizations received funding to provide summer engagement opportunities for Opportunity Youth.
- Programming began on or about June 6th, 2022, and closed by September 2nd, 2022.
- **220 youths were served** during the 2022 summer break.
- 41% of participants were between the ages of 12-14 years old
- **Black/ African American youth made up 86% of participants**
- **147 of 213 youth reported Opportunity Youth status**, representing 66% of participants.
 - 7% reported gang/ crew/ or group affiliation, 13% reported having some juvenile or criminal system involvement, 9% reported being disconnected from school, work, or community organizations, 24% reported being a previous crime victim, and 53% reported having a close friend or family member shot in the last year.



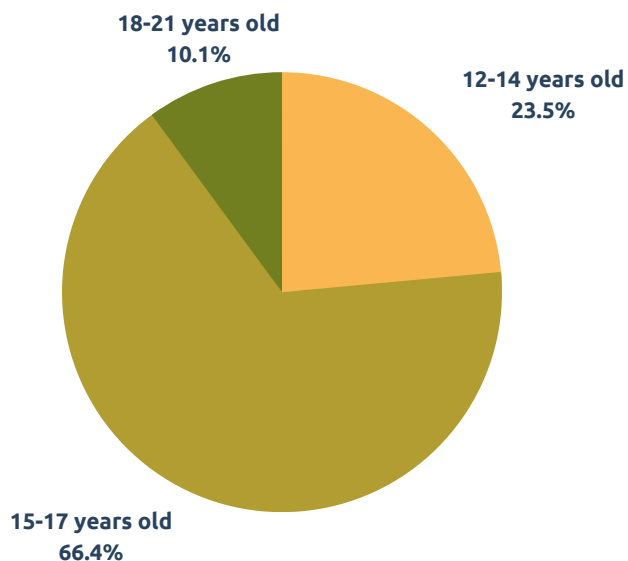
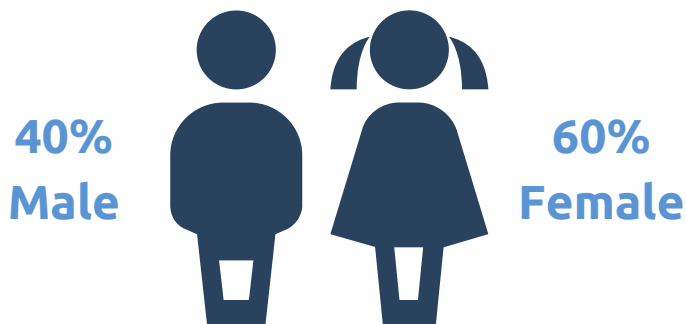
340 total Youth Served

Among Spring Break & Summer Programs

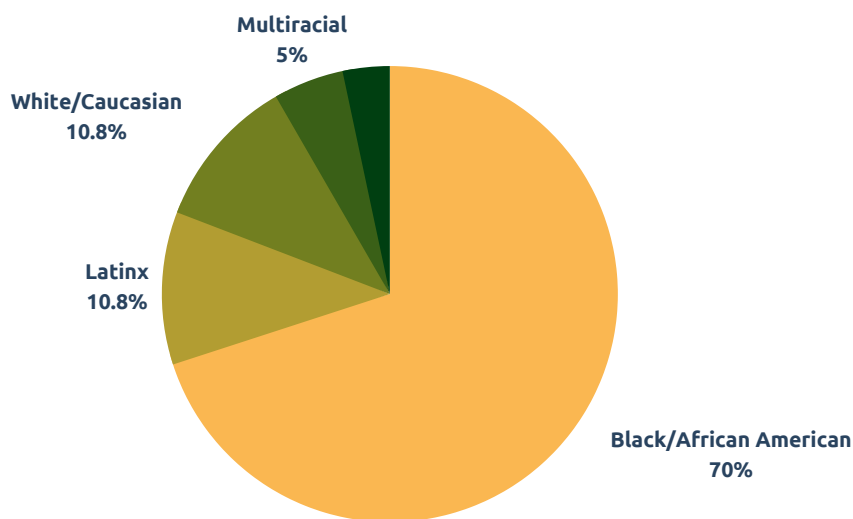


Spring Break Program Demographics

Spring Break Opportunity Youth Grant (SBOYG) programs sought to be gender inclusive



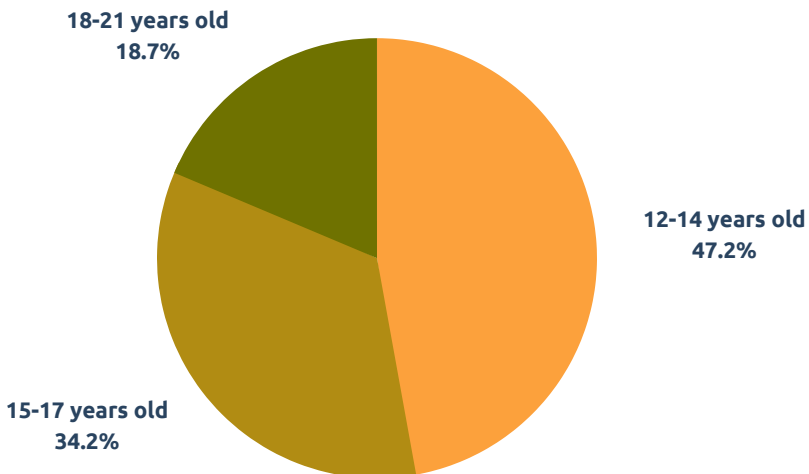
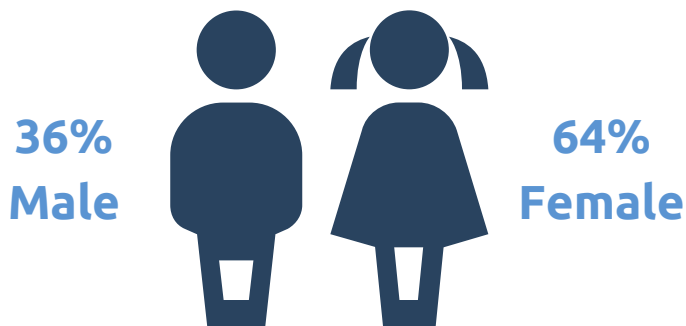
Over half of SBOYG program participants were between the ages of 15 and 17. Programs served youth ages 12 - 21.



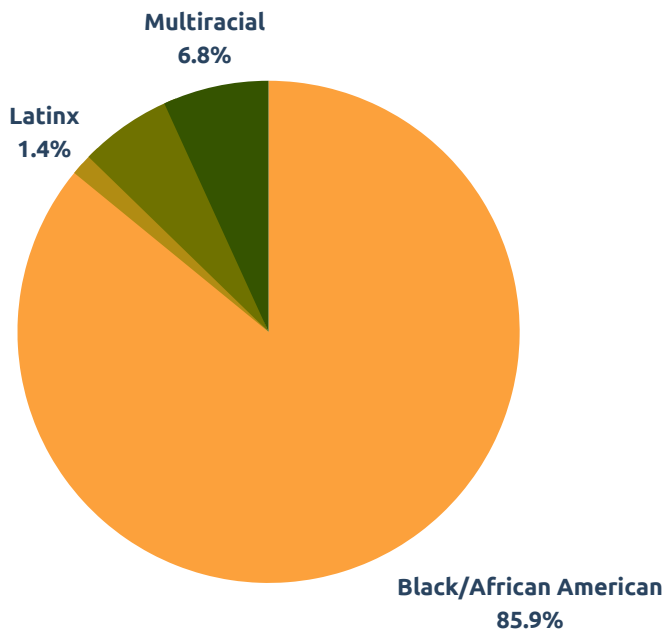
Two-thirds of SBOYG program participants were Black/ African American, Making up 70%

Summer Program Demographics

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

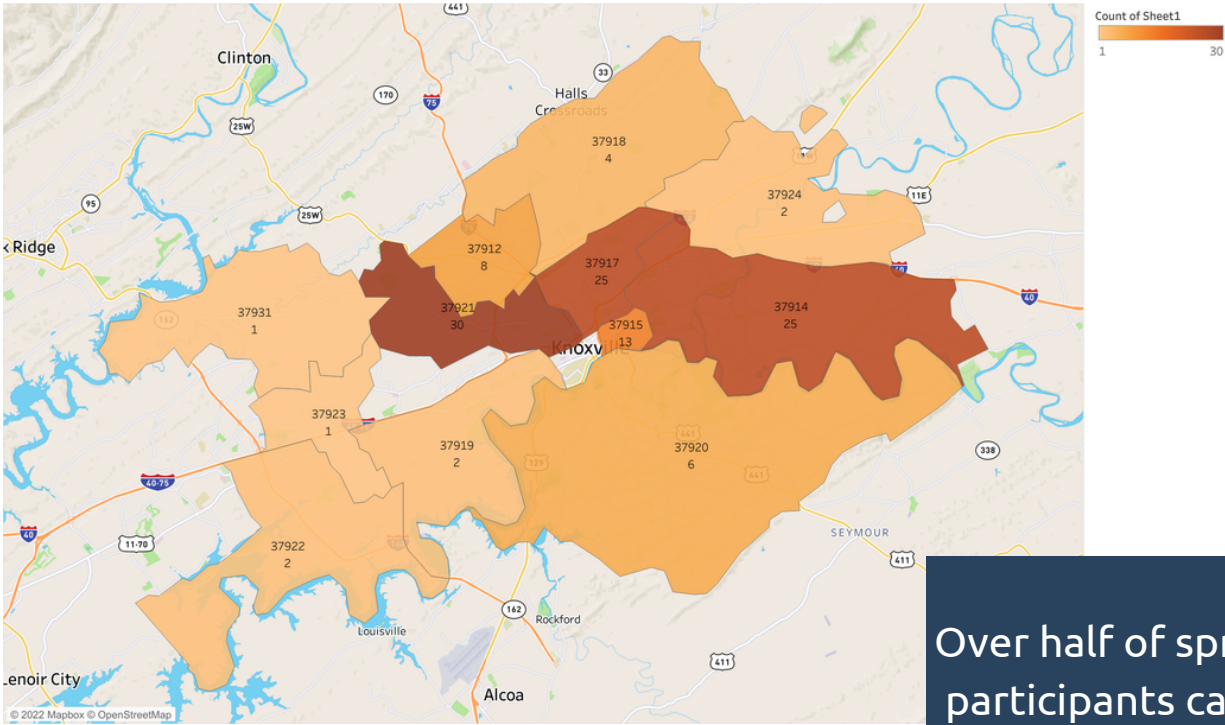


Almost half of SOYG program participants were between the ages of 12 and 14. Programs served youth ages 12 - 21.



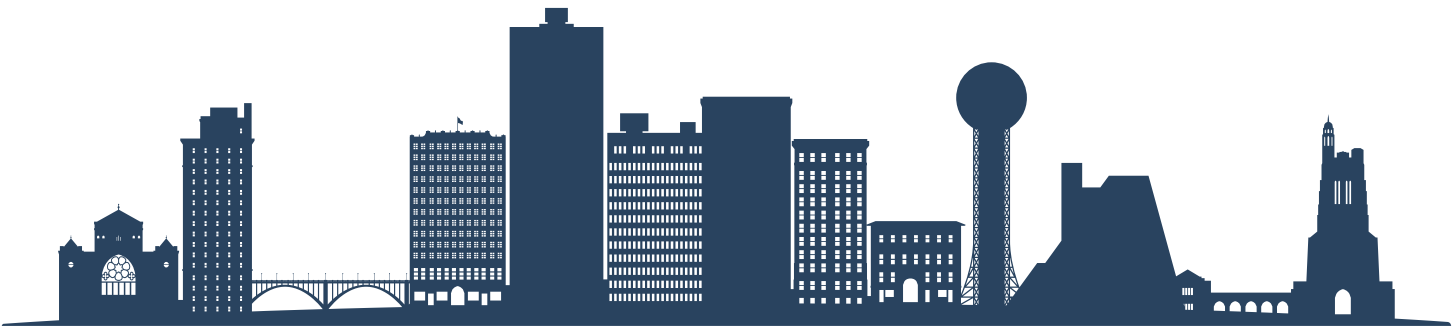
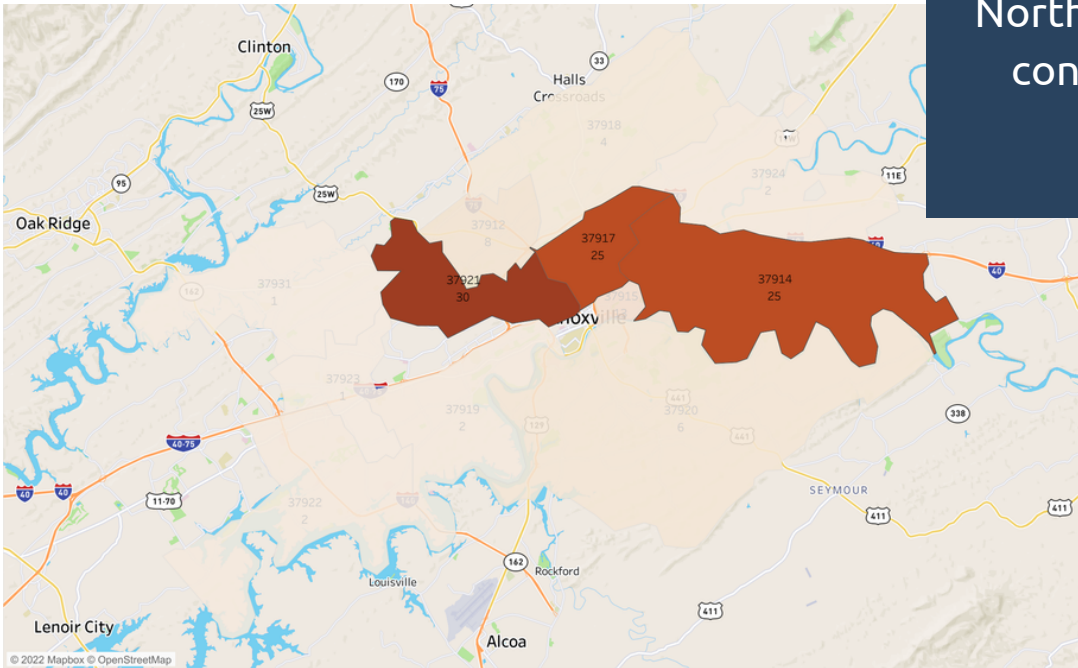
Well over two-thirds of SOYG program participants were Black/ African American, Making up 86%

Geographic

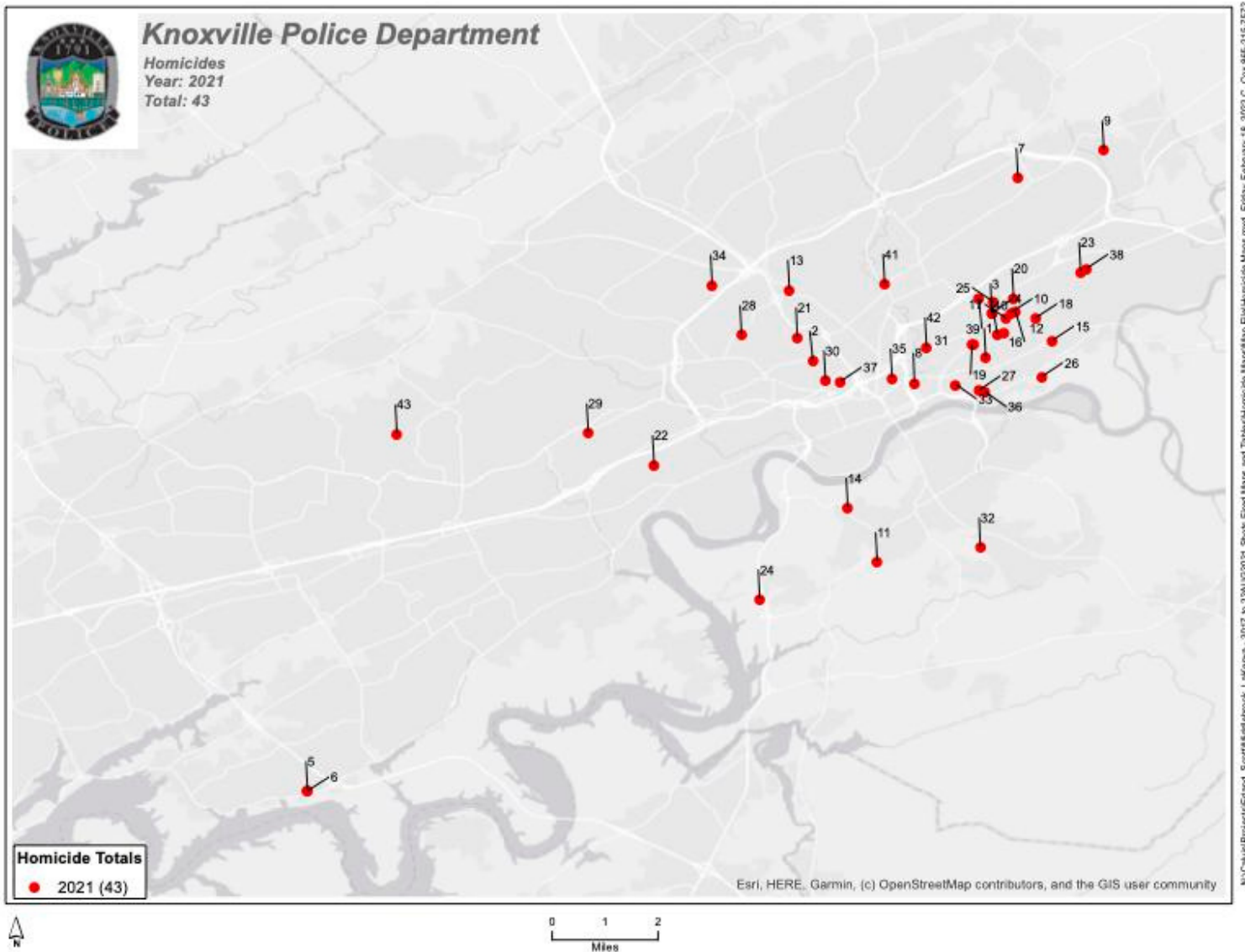


Count of SBYOG participants by Knoxville Zip Codes.

Over half of spring break program participants came from zip codes 37921, 37917, and 37914, spanning through East and Northwest Knoxville. This was consistent during summer programming.



Geographic cont.



Count of homicides in the year 2021

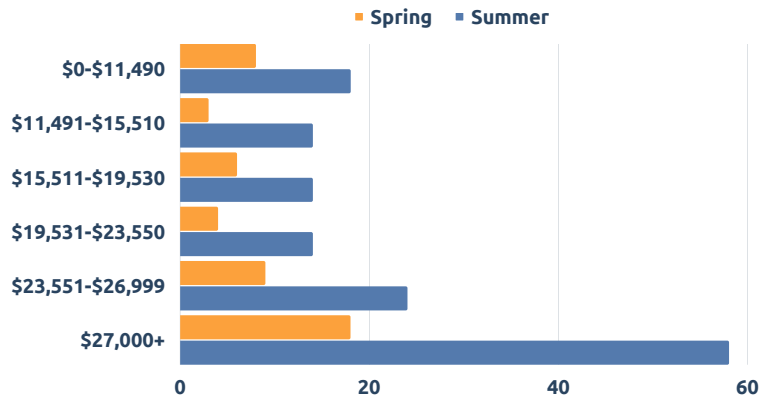
Every year, Knoxville Police Department (KPD) reports the number of homicides and their locations. In 2021, there were 43 total homicides reported, with the majority occurring in the East Knoxville Area. This area has had increasingly more homicides over the years.⁸ Both spring break and summer programs effectively reached areas at high risk of violence, providing youth opportunities for engagement away from violence.



Poverty and Violence

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to addressing community violence since the causes of youth violence are typically multi-layered and interrelated with various circumstances and experiences impacting youth. However, researchers and community members identify poverty (i.e., not having enough money to meet basic needs including food, clothing and shelter) as a key contributor to violence.⁷

In Knoxville, nearly 42% of Black/African American residents were living at or below the poverty level in 2018 compared to 22% of Whites in Knoxville. Additionally, more young people under the age of 18 lived at or below the poverty level when compared to those aged 18-64 and 65 years of age and older.⁹



Household Income of Spring and Summer Break Participants

Though every participant didn't report household income, the information reported indicated that several program participants came from families below the poverty line.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) youth violence is a major public health concern that has profound and often lifelong impacts on an individual's psychological and social well-being.¹⁰ Young people who become involved in violence often do not see education as a viable path for them to gain status or advancement in life, and turn to riskier but perhaps more familiar paths.¹¹

A Pathway to Education

Research suggests that education levels are often an indicator of poverty.

In Knoxville, the 2018 median annual earnings for those with a graduate or professional degree was \$51,570, which is \$34,425 higher than the median annual earnings of \$17,145 for those who did not graduate from high school.¹² A greater proportion of those who do not complete high school live at or below the poverty level compared to those with higher levels of education. Those with a bachelor's degree or higher are the least likely to live at or below the poverty level.¹³



Spring and summer programs had a significant impact on youth wanting to pursue education. For participants who might have lacked confidence and motivation to pursue college or technical education or didn't have parental support, youth participants found the programs helpful.

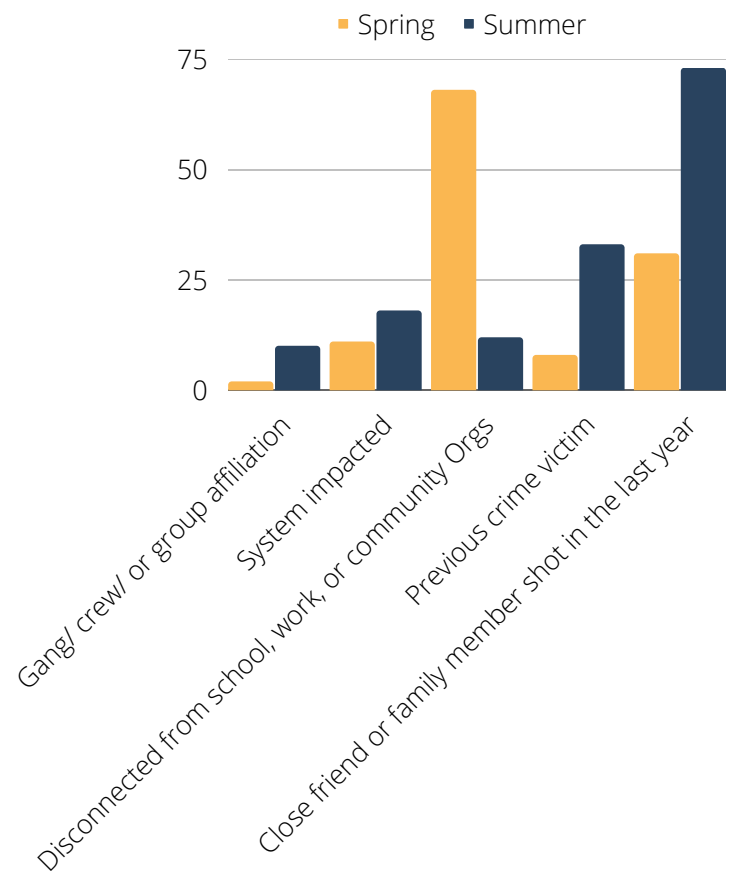
“One of the young women in our program said her goal is to attend college but she does not have parental support and doesn't know how to apply or most importantly pay for college. We asked Caity, one of our community engagement specialists to mentor her. Caity has been on her own since she was 14 and raised her 2 younger brothers. While she works for SEED part-time, she is also a college student at Pellissippi. Caity talked with the young woman and walked her through registering, how to look for grants and apply for financial aid and about jobs with flexible hours that she can work while taking classes. I believe that prior to the spring break program, she thought college was an unattainable goal.”

— SEED Knoxville

Connecting with Opportunity Youth

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

"The majority of the 100+ youth who have attended after-school and summer programs at the Phyllis Wheatley Center in the past two years are Opportunity Youth. These young people, living both at- and in-risk, seek academic support and a safe space for recreation and physical activity. YWCA's trauma-responsive framework is essential in this work." — YWCA



Reducing Violence With Job Opportunities

Spotlight: Boston's Summer Youth Employment Program

The spring and summer programs continue to show that providing employment opportunities for youth helps reduce violence.¹⁴ Research completed in *Boston's Summer Employment Program* showed that youth who participated in summer employment opportunities and mentorship had lower rates of violent-crime arrests throughout the following year. **These opportunities provided youth with the exposure and tools to improve employment success, with a particular focus on reducing gaps between racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. As a result, violent crime decreased by 35% for 17 months following the program, suggesting that youths' summer experiences impacted their behavior well after the program. Participants also showed improvements in their skills, attitudes, and behavior.**¹⁵ Similar programs in Chicago, New York City, Louisville, Kentucky, and Houston have also shown promising results, pairing employment with social and emotional support for youth with a proven risk of violence.

Several spring and summer programs provided participants with stipends or temporary jobs for the duration of spring break. Some youth participants received gift cards for their engagement such as attending workshops or completing a job shadowing experience, and others received stipends ranging from \$100-\$200, offering youth a temporary source of income.



"Of our eight participants, only two had experience with resume writing and the importance of having a professional email address as emerging leaders in our community. By the end of the week, all participants were exposed to resume writing and email creation."

— MUSE

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

"We emphasized leadership and appreciation...This experience was not only a time to learn the art of balancing leadership responsibilities while learning the art of storytelling, but also a powerful culmination of the Spring Break week for students."

— MUSE



"At the start of the week, only one of the participants confidently reported that they could create a resume. At the end of the week, all the participants reported that they could create a resume. Additionally, at the start of the week, 40% of participants were confident that they could complete a job application. At the end of the week, 100% of participants reported confidence in their ability to complete an application." — YWCA

"A senior at Fulton High School spent the week supporting the Spring Break camps. She led the children each day in fun activities and games, and all Muse staff noticed a shift in their confidence level throughout the course of the week. She told us that She learned a lot about what these younger children are going through, and by the end of the week they were opening up to her and really trusting her." — MUSE



Skills Learned cont.

Spring and summer programs provided youth participants with several skills and engagement opportunities, several of which helped prepare them for future jobs and careers.

Skills included

Financial literacy

Budgeting

Interviewing

Identifying strengths

Goal setting

Martial arts

Community care

Leadership

Resume creation

Event planning

Arts and crafts

Screen printing

Ceramics

Photography

Vision board workshopping

Music creation

Creative writing

Drawing

Painting

Gardening

Healthy eating

Food sustainability



What Works?

Youth living in predominately Black or African American communities experiencing high levels of poverty and crime need policies and programs designed for their unique history and experiences.¹⁶

The CDC's Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence recommends the following interventions: Strengthening Youth's Skills, Connecting Youth to Caring Adults and Activities, Creating Protective Community Environments, and Intervening to Lessen Harms and Prevent Future Risks.¹⁷

Through the SBOYG, programs collaborated with other organizations, businesses, and community members to provide effective interventions and engagement opportunities for youth participants.

"100% of our participants stated that they would like to participate for more than just Spring Break. Youth participants expressed that more programs like this would have prevented them from being arrested, getting their girlfriend pregnant, getting caught stealing, and being at the wrong place at the wrong time." — Gold Key Access

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Many factors contribute to the circumstances youth find themselves in today, as such, multiple system stakeholders (i.e., organizations, churches, businesses, community members, etc.) must be collectively engaged with each other to create supportive environments for Opportunity Youth, and youth more broadly, to thrive. Consistent and collaborative systems of support will create environments to allow opportunity youth to reach their full potential by creating a web of support networks throughout the Knoxville community. Recognizing that everyone in Knoxville is a part of a village meant to keep its residents safe is critical. Knoxville communities must be committed to creating a cycle of community safety against violence — a cycle that can be passed down through generations. The spring break and summer programs helped reinforce that cycle.



Where do we go from here?

It was a real welcome to see these kids show up without being prodded or pushed into community service to make a difference. They saw us making a difference and wanted to be a part of the process."

- Karate Five Association



OBJECTIVES MET, LESSONS LEARNED

Both spring break and Summer programs accomplished the goals of collaborating with community organizations and engaging Opportunity Youth in innovative engagement opportunities, some of which were paid. 10 organizations were selected for funding for the spring, and 9 participated. 11 organizations received funding and participated during the summer.

Continued programming for youth during critical school breaks (i.e., fall break, spring break, and summer) offer some of the best times to engage youth while they are out of school to combat violence in the Knoxville community. Youth are looking for opportunities to be engaged, particularly Opportunity Youth. Youth were able to transition to after-school programming or employment with the Organizations they were engaged with. This reaffirmed that youth benefitted from programs that served as a bridge to resources, professional development opportunities, engagement activities, and job opportunities.



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2. Currie, 219-222.
3. Erin Grinshteyn and David Hemenway, "Violent Death Rates in the US Compared to Those of the Other High-Income Countries, 2015," *Preventive Medicine* 123 (2019): 20–26, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0091743519300659?via%3Dihub>.
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5. Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Crime in the United States, 2019," table 47, (2020), <https://bit.ly/2Pt1Qxf>. Weapons offenses include "the violation of laws or ordinances prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession, concealment, or use of firearms, cutting instruments, explosives, incendiary devices, or other deadly weapons." <https://bit.ly/2MdzQZf>.
6. Out of 120 participating youth, only 48 youth reported back on their household income. As such, the number of youth living in a household where the income was less than \$26,999 totaled 30, and those living in a household where the income was over \$27,000 totaled 18.
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