Child Friendly Cities Initiative
Candidate City

City of Houston
Child Friendly Cities Initiative

ACTION PLAN REPORT

April 2023



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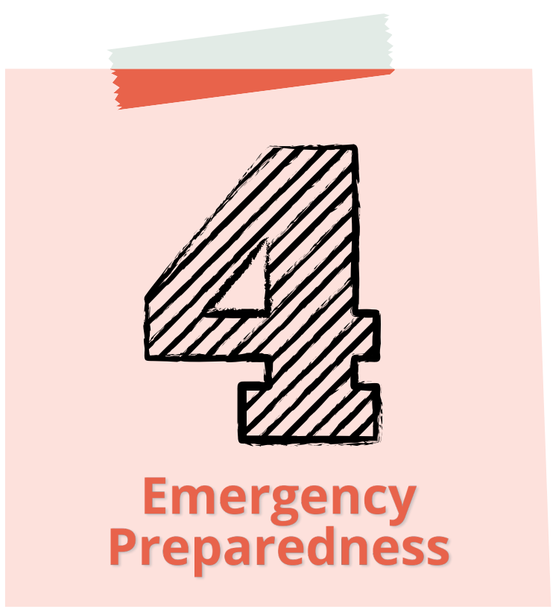

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PART 1

Introduction

Letter from the Mayor



In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic left the nation reeling not only from the virus but from social inequities that were illuminated as we tried to combat it. Issues concerning access to health, housing, education, and other social services afflicted multitudes of Americans, including many Houstonians who have been historically underserved. The pandemic exacerbated the need for mental health professionals, educators, and other essential service providers.

Youth quietly suffered as they encountered the challenges of social isolation, lose of loved ones, and transitioning to online learning. In light of this, we strengthened our commitment to youth by being the first city in the United States to be a candidate for the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI).

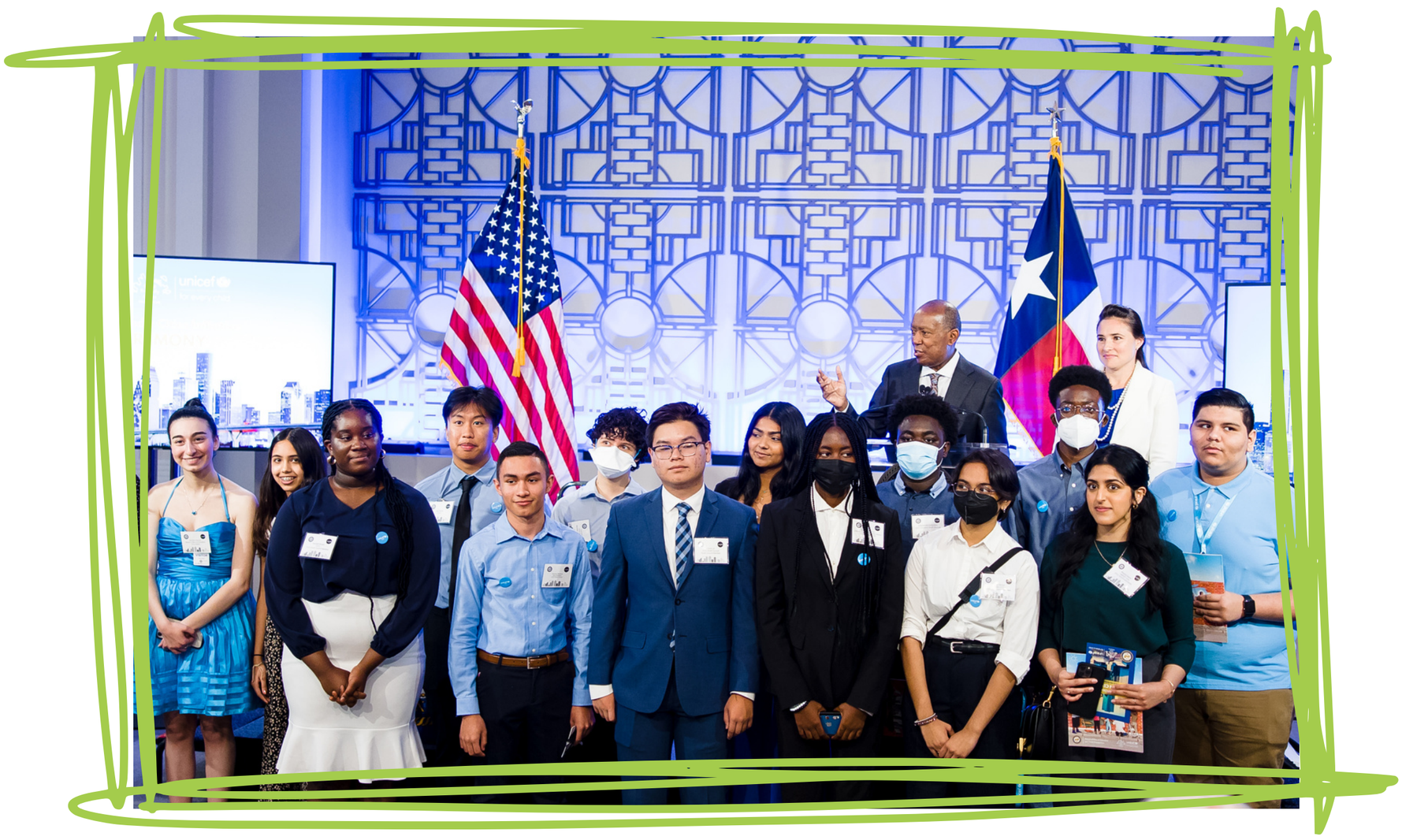
As the first candidate for the UNICEF CFCI, Houston is building upon a proud legacy of protecting children's rights advocated by city and community leaders. Youth are among our most vulnerable Houstonians, and the Child Friendly Cities Initiative aims to ensure that every child feels supported, has their voice championed, and has their social safety net expanded through the coordination of services to respond to their needs. I believe that it is through collaboration and participation that we can build a healthy, strong, and inclusive community.

I thank all the stakeholders, providers, adults, and youth who were a part of bringing this initiative to fruition. Your teamwork exemplifies the synergy that Houston can and should utilize to create and inform great change within and outside the government arena. The Child Friendly Cities Initiative is one step toward a resilient and more equitable Houston.

I commend the work completed by my office of Education & Youth Engagement led by Director Olivera Jankovska and hereby I am excited to announce the CFCI Action Plan Report, and I hope it will help champion the diversity of Houston while supporting all community members, including its youth, in whom the city finds its vitality and strength.

Mayor Sylvester Turner

A Child Friendly City



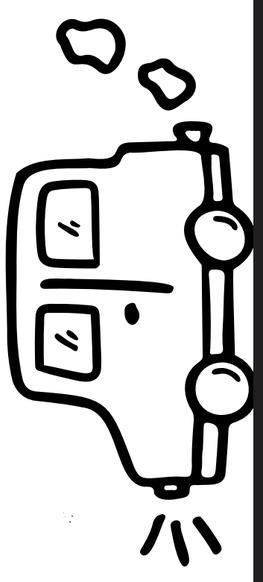
Mayor Turner and Olivera Jankovska, Education & Youth Engagement Director, with the CFCI Youth Leaders at the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) candidacy ceremony on August 2022

In August of 2022, the City of Houston became the first candidate for the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) in the United States, a milestone commemorated at the CFCI Child Rights Celebration, where Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and the Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement hosted over 100 CFCI supporters, youth, city and elected officials.

The celebration marked the completion of the City of Houston's CFCI Action Plan, a roadmap that lists activities and commitments that the administration and designated partners will work to uphold to address challenges faced by youth that were identified through the CFCI process in government and community assessments.

The City of Houston continues to be a national leader in children's rights and is excited to receive the official recognition as the first Child Friendly City in the United States. Thus far, the city has demonstrated a strong commitment to meaningful youth participation in city government and to developing effective systems of support for children's safety and well-being.

This report shares the theory of change and action plan details of the three priorities of the City of Houston CFCI Action Plan: youth participation, mental health, and emergency preparedness. It also highlights the City of Houston policies and programs that address these priorities and provides a synopsis of activities in progress or completed.



CFCI Recognition Process

1 **Assessments**
Conduct community and government assessments to assess the state of children's rights

2 **Situational Analysis**
Compile and analyze data from assessments to identify issue areas

3 **Intergenerational Workshops**
Rank and examine issue areas and co-create solutions with youth and service providers

4 **Local Action Plan**
Compose and implement the plan with strategies, activities, and metrics to measure results

5 **Evaluation**
Measure success of activities and commitments presented in the CFCI Action Plan

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative provides a framework that advocates for the safety, well-being, and success of children and their families.

To gain official recognition, the City of Houston conducted a situational analysis on the state of children's rights in the city and intergenerational workshops to select priority issues and solutions that address challenges faced by Houston children and youth.

The results were used to develop the CFCI Action Plan which provided a one-year roadmap with city-level theories of change and city-wide strategies for improving the wellbeing of children and youth.

Since March 2022, the City of Houston has expanded partnerships, engaged Houston youth, and worked with city leaders to address the priorities listed in the CFCI Action Plan and complete the identified benchmarks. Additionally, we have begun to evaluate the success of activities and commitments from the Action Plan.

PART 2

Youth Participation

CFCI Priority:
Youth Participation



Mayor Turner and Police Chief Finner with members of the Mayor's Youth Council and Youth Police Advisory Council at Fireside Chat on Tuesday, March 7, 2023

The right to civic participation is a foundational goal area for the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, as children should be an inextricable part of the decision-making process that informs local action towards the achievement of their rights. The City of Houston and Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement (MOEYE) seek to uphold children's participation articles set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) including:



Right to Have a Say in All Matters Affecting Them and Be Take Seriously



Right to Seek and Receive Information, Within the Law



Right to Meet w/ Other Children and Join Organizations

The CFCI situational analysis identified this goal area as the area in need of the most improvement in the City of Houston. Youth support and development opportunities are part of Mayor Turner's strategic plan for public safety. The City of Houston has an array of youth programs that support the healthy development of children (a comprehensive list can be found here). The MOEYE through the CFCI Youth Council and by hiring two Youth Engagement Managers, continues to increase youth opportunities for participation and raise awareness of children's rights.

Priority 1:
Few opportunities for youth civic involvement and decision-making

CFCI Goal Area 2: Children's Participation

Every child has their voice, needs and priorities heard and taken into account in public laws, policies, budgets, programs, and decisions that affect them.

Objective: Young people are involved in planning or decision making for their communities.

Target Group/Audience: Youth (ages 13-18 years)



If we take action on these strategies…

- Community Building Strategies
  - Build a sustainable youth participation mechanism for CFCI
  - Support youth-led child rights awareness raising
- Child-Friendly Governance Strategies
  - Create a children's budget and a permanent children's advocate position within the city

We will see these results for children…

- Build a sustainable youth participation mechanism for CFCI → City resolution ensuring the CFCI Youth Council's role and voice in decision-making for CFCI
- Support youth-led child rights awareness raising → Children's rights are integrated into a city sponsored Child Rights online resource hub
- Create a children's budget and a permanent children's advocate position within the city → Hire children's advocate and develop child rights fellowship program

And we will impact children's lives through…

- City resolution ensuring the CFCI Youth Council's role and voice in decision-making for CFCI → Increased youth civic engagement opportunities
- Children's rights are integrated into a city sponsored Child Rights online resource hub → Increased awareness of children's rights among youth who utilize resource hub
- Hire children's advocate and develop child rights fellowship program → Strengthened communications, planning and decision- making with children

In Planning

In Progress

Completed

What strategies will we take action on?	What activities need to happen to realize this strategy?	Who is responsible for these activities?	What resources are needed?
Build a sustainable youth participation mechanism for CFCI	✓ Create the Houston CFCI Youth Council ✓ Formalize the partnership with Mayor's Youth Council ✓ Establish partnerships with other youth leadership organizations	• Mayor's Youth Council • CFCI Youth Council • CFCI Program Manager • Other youth organizations who participate in CFCI community assessments	✓ 2 full-time youth engagement managers to advance children's rights ✓ Stipends and in-kind donations to incentivize youth engagement and participation
Support youth-led child rights awareness raising	✓ Youth present research findings of CFCI Situational Analysis ◔ Launch Child Rights and Social Media Campaign ✓ Webinars and panels addressing CFCI Priorities ◔ Partnerships to advise and promote campaign	• Adult Volunteers and MOEYE Interns • CFCI Youth Council and Ambassadors • Mayor's Youth Council • City and community partners including Mayor's Office of Communications, HISD, Alief ISD, Aldine ISD, and youth programs	✓ Stipend for youth, interns, and staff working on the CFCI website development ✓ Funding for marketing and outreach materials ✓ Branding and marketing consultant and intern
Create a children's budget and a permanent advocate position within the city	✓ Funding sustainable funding source for a permanent youth engagement … Develop fellowship program to support CFCI projects	• Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement • CFCI Leadership Team and Taskforce • Hire Houston Youth • UNICEF USA	✓ Part-time grant writer ✓ 5 year budget to fund a full-time children's advocate position and fellowship program stipends

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

Empowering from Cradle to Career

Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement

In 2016, the City of Houston created the first-ever Office of Education in city government history. No other City of Houston official or mayoral administration had placed emphasis on matters of education until Mayor Sylvester Turner took office. Mayor Turner believes that each generation of children should be assured equitable educational opportunities and a better life.

To support youth engagement and create institutional support for children's rights, the Mayor's Office of Education expanded to the Mayor’s Office of Education and Youth Engagement (MOEYE). Through collaboration, communication, and coordination, the MOEYE strives to support all people ages 0-24 by procuring a successful future based on their interests and passions. The MOEYE will continue to be a bridge between youth and resources within the city and connect youth to the many youth supporting programs in the City of Houston. Additionally, the MOEYE is determined to expand its outreach and support to marginalized children and youth by connecting them to essential knowledge and resources that help them thrive professionally and personally.

The MOEYE has hired a Youth Engagement Manager, with plans to hire a second, to work within the office to support the implementation of programs focused on ensuring Houston is a safe, equitable, just, inclusive, and young people-responsive city. Programs include, but are not limited to, mental health, emergency preparedness, and resource accessibility. These two individuals will support city departments and community organizations to ensure that young people’s rights, voices, needs and priorities are integrated into public policies, programs, and decision-making.

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

CFCI Youth Council

The CFCI Youth Council was established during the CFCI community assessment process and it seeks to advance children's rights and ensure youth voice is considered in the City of Houston's programs and decision-making. Members of the CFCI Youth Council are given the opportunity to engage and participate in discussions and service projects that advocate for local children's rights and address the priority issues identified in the Houston CFCI Action Plan. The Council has worked with various city and community leaders on youth-led projects, including a child rights podcast, a youth mental health training, and an emergency preparedness communications campaign.

Milestones/Accomplishments of the CFCI Youth Council 2022 - 2023:

- The CFCI Youth Council is in its **third cohort** and is now part of the newly developed CFCI Youth Leader program which includes ambassadors and school liaisons. Approximately 200 youth applied to join the program.
- **100 Houston youth** have participated in the CFCI Youth Leader program.
- Analyzed data and developed program and policy recommendations for a **Youth and Family Report** on how to address youth challenges.
- Advised on graphic design for the **CFCI Action Plan**, provided feedback, and supported the development and implementation of strategies listed.
- Served on the **intergenerational committee** to develop the Houston Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights.
- Developed three **youth-led Mental Health in Schools workshops**. Findings can be found here. Data collected was shared at the 6th Annual Center for School Behavioral Health Mental Health Conference. Presentation can be found here.
- Developed a **child rights podcast** focused on highlighting youth and city leaders working on the five CFCI Goal Areas.
- Supported the development & facilitation of the **CFCI Youth Advocacy Training Series**, which empowers youth to advocate for the issues they care about. **70+ young Houstonians participated** in the first two trainings of the series.

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

CFCI Youth Council

Evaluation and Youth Impact Statements

Pre and post-surveys were disseminated to youth council members in order to evaluate their experience on the CFCI Youth Council. The surveys collected youth feedback on their participation in the council and what impact their involvement has had on their life. Below are youth quotes from the post-surveys.

> *I expected to have a voice in today's society as a representative of all the youths. I would say that these expectations were definitely met.*

CFCI Youth Leaders – Cohort Size	
2020 - 2021	16
2021 - 2022	30
2022 - 2023	100

> *My expectations flew through the roof. I didn't know exactly what I was getting myself into, but I met really good people and learned about different types of research. I gained knowledge about CFCI and UNICEF as a whole and learned the process of creating bylaws and a constitution. The youth council is really hardworking and welcoming; I hope to continue the work with the youth council in the future.*

> *When I joined, I thought I was just helping to make decisions regarding the community assessments. I expected to have my voice heard and acted upon in small ways. I expected a friendly environment. I expected a discussion. All these expectations were met. I was pleasantly surprised to see how much power was given to youth.*

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

School Partnerships

As part of the CFCI government assessment, the Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement (MOEYE) identified six communities (Alief/Westwood, Houston Heights, Greenspoint, Gulfton, Houston/Trinity Gardens, and Sunnyside) where CFCI pilot programs could be implemented in smaller communities and then evaluated for efficacy. The CFCI Focus communities were chosen based on the following indicators:



High concentration of youth populations (ages 0-17)



Percentage of children living in poverty compared to the overall poverty rate



Representation of the diverse racial composition of the City of Houston



Availability of community resources and accessibility to community organizations

Students from these communities usually are underrepresented in youth advocacy, therefore it became CFCI's mission to prioritize youth participation from these communities. Central to the effort to garner youth participation from underrepresented communities was to identify adult liaisons, trusted by youth, who can outreach and promote leadership and participation opportunities to them. There are twenty-six high schools that lie within CFCI focus communities, and the MOEYE has been working to identify CFCI adult liaisons at each of the twenty-six high schools in the CFCI focus communities.

Accomplishments:

- CFCI has been in regular communication with all twenty-six high schools
- Seven liaisons have been identified out of the twenty-six focus schools
- District partnerships have been forged in HISD and Alief ISD
- Approximately thirty-three percent of the applications received for the CFCI Youth Council were from youth within CFCI focus schools

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

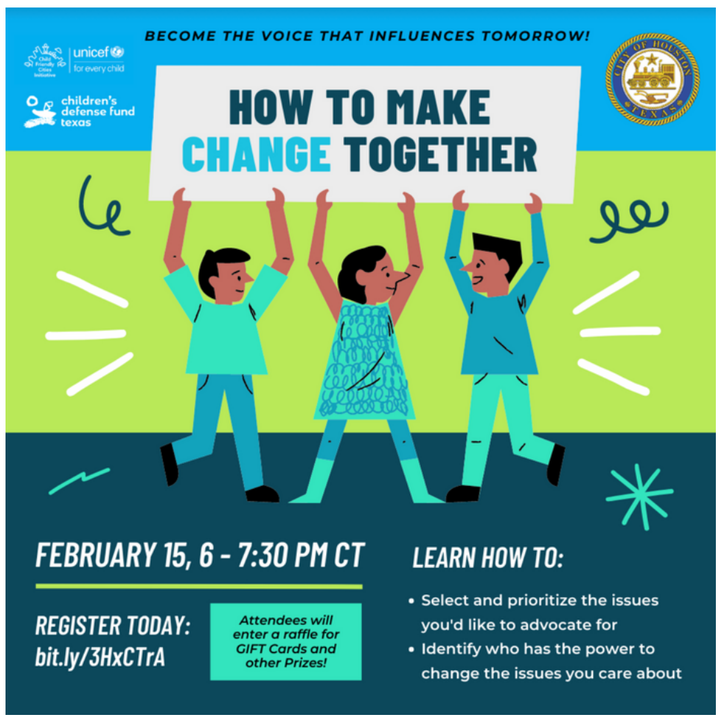
Youth Advocacy Trainings

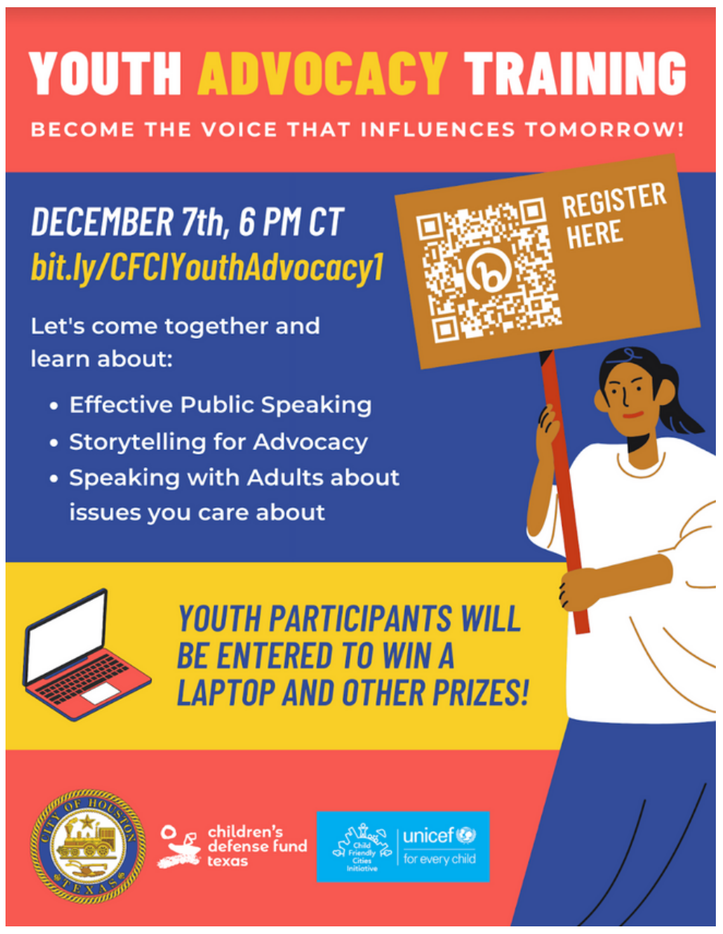
The youth advocacy training series seeks to empower youth to advocate for the issues they care about and give them the tools to take action and create change in their communities. By holding advocacy trainings and teaching youth how to actualize their voices, Houston aims to directly observe the rights outlined for children's participation in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The objectives of the trainings include:

- Teach youth how to express themselves with confidence and feel comfortable speaking to adults about the issues they care about.
- Teach youth how to become effective public speakers, share their stories, and use their voices for change.
- Create awareness of children's rights.
- Teach youth about who has power over issues (Power-mapping) and share with them strategies on indirect and direct advocacy methods.
- Walk youth through the process of transforming an idea into collective action.

Accomplishments:

- Hosted two youth advocacy trainings
  - CFCI Youth Advocacy Training on December 7th, 2022
  - How to Make Change Together on February 15th 2023
- 70+ youth attended the trainings, which hosted 106 total participants from all age groups.
- The development and facilitation of the trainings was possible thanks to the Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement and their partnership with CFCI Youth Leaders and community partners, including UNICEF USA and the Children's Defense Fund.





Flyers used for outreach and promotion of CFCI Youth Advocacy Trainings

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

Youth Advocacy Trainings

Evaluation

After the advocacy trainings, 60 participants responded to the post-evaluation surveys. Most of the survey respondents expressed that hearing from youth speakers about their experiences in advocacy was a highlight of their training experience. They also enjoyed interactive breakout rooms and felt they achieved a better understanding of how local government works, how to problem solve, and conduct advocacy.

Youth feedback from the training also revealed that youth would like some time to reflect upon speaker panels during the training and have more time to ask questions. They also want more frequent trainings and want them to include more interactive activities (polling, breakout room discussions, games, etc.). To view summaries of youth evaluations, click here. Below are some comments youth shared:

Youth Impact Statements from Evaluation:

> *If I ever see a problem that I want solved, I'll know the steps on who I need to go to and what the process may look like.*

> *I feel inspired of knowing other people who advocated for issues despite being so young...*

> *I absolutely loved the CFCI Training. I did not know that there was such a huge community of people my age who were willing to discuss their opinions and talk about the experience of being a young person in today's world. I especially liked having Angel and Sierra in the conversation, because they encouraged me to continue pursuing my passion for advocacy and social/political sciences beyond high school.*

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

Child Rights Podcast: Another Step for Youth

The Another Step for Youth is a youth-led podcast geared towards creating awareness and discussing efforts in Houston to advance children's rights. The Another Step for Youth podcast will include 7 episodes that aim to:

- Highlight the importance of youth voices
- Empower youth to advocate for themselves and their community
- Invite youth to join and support organizations that prioritize their rights, such as the Child Friendly Cities Initiative in the City of Houston

The CFCI Youth Council and Ambassadors are creating the content, art work, and scripts for the podcast. The podcast will include intergenerational conversations between youth and community and city leaders. Each episode of the podcast will highlight a different goal area from the CFCI Framework.

The podcast received a mini-grant from the Houston Community Action Council and will be professionally recorded during the summer of 2023. The 15 youth working on the podcast partook in a pre-survey, testing their knowledge on children's rights, and will complete a post-survey to assess how much they have learned, following completion of the podcast.



First draft of Another Step For Youth podcast logo by Neila, CFCI Youth Ambassador

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

As the fourth most populous city in the country, the City of Houston is mindful of its responsibility to lead the way in improving the wellbeing of children and increasing their access to nature. To demonstrate this commitment, the Houston Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement has launched a Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBOR), an initiative developed by the Cities Connecting Children to Nature program, a national partnership between the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network. This initiative aligns with the city's commitment to recognizing children's rights, as demonstrated through the recent adoption of a Children's Bill of Rights in Sports and Houston's designation as the first city in the United States as a candidate for the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative.

An intergenerational committee of local youth and community leaders was convened in the Summer of 2022 to discuss challenges to nature accessibility in the Greater Houston area and determine the rights that would be included in the bill.

"Equitable access to nature and its many benefits is critical to the mental, physical, civic, and cultural wellbeing of children,' said Jaime Gonzalez, the Healthy Communities Director of The Nature Conservancy in Texas. "It will also help to make our communities more resilient to climate change and other stress. The Houston Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights will help ignite conversations and actions to help us co-create a city where nature and children flourish
together."

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

The COBOR bill will be formally recognized through a Mayoral Proclamation during Houston Climate Week in April 2023. To rights listed on the COBOR are featured below.

Houston children have the right to:

1. Safe and accessible routes to outdoor spaces in their communities
2. Adequate shade in the outdoors
3. Connect with nature on their school grounds
4. Equitably funded public parks regardless of zip code
5. Discover leadership opportunities to be stewards of nature
6. Be included and accommodated with accessible outdoor environments
7. Green spaces that mitigate the impact of climate change
8. Experience the mental health and holistic wellness benefits of engaging with nature
9. See and experience native wildlife and plants in their local park and green spaces
10. Free or low-cost outdoor programming
11. Breathe fresh and clean air
12. Learn how to be safe in the outdoors

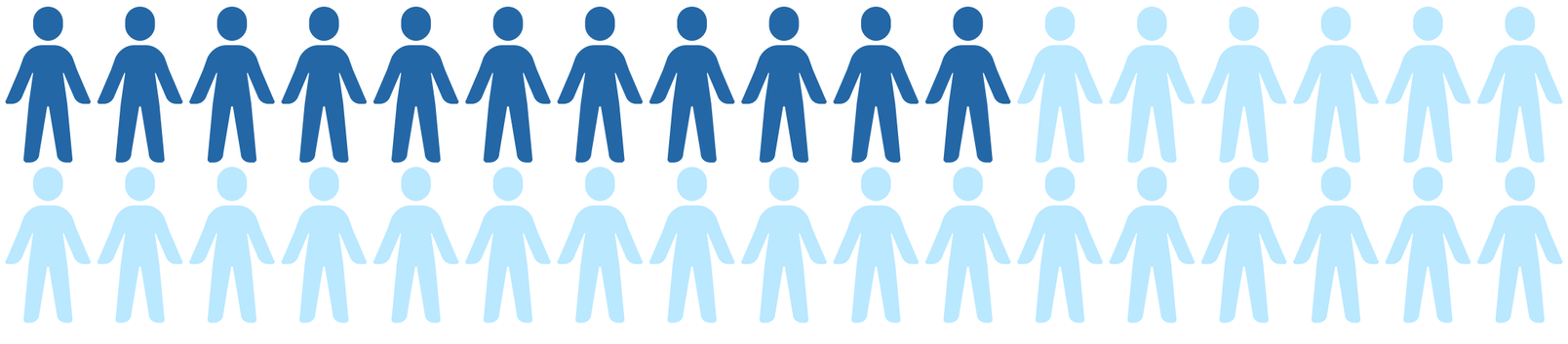
City and Community partners that participated in the COBOR intergenerational committee

Youth Participation Policies & Activities

Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

Youth Participation

Of the 34 total committee members, 11 were high school students (ages 14-18) from the Greater Houston Area. The COBOR was also led by youth employed by the City of Houston. Four of them were current undergraduate or graduate students (18-24) while five were high school students (ages 14-18) from the Greater Houston Area.



Youth Participants in Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights Committee

Youth Impact Statements

> *My favorite part of being on the committee was interacting and discussing issues with peers and coming up with agreeable solutions. The COBOR will help ensure that children grow up interacting in safe and healthy environments outdoors that benefit their mental and physical well beings.*

> *Contributing to the Houston COBOR by brainstorming ideas was my favorite part of being a committee member. The bill can serve as encouragement and possibly prompt community members as well as school districts to make outdoor experiences a priority and a vital part of development.*

PART 3

Mental Health

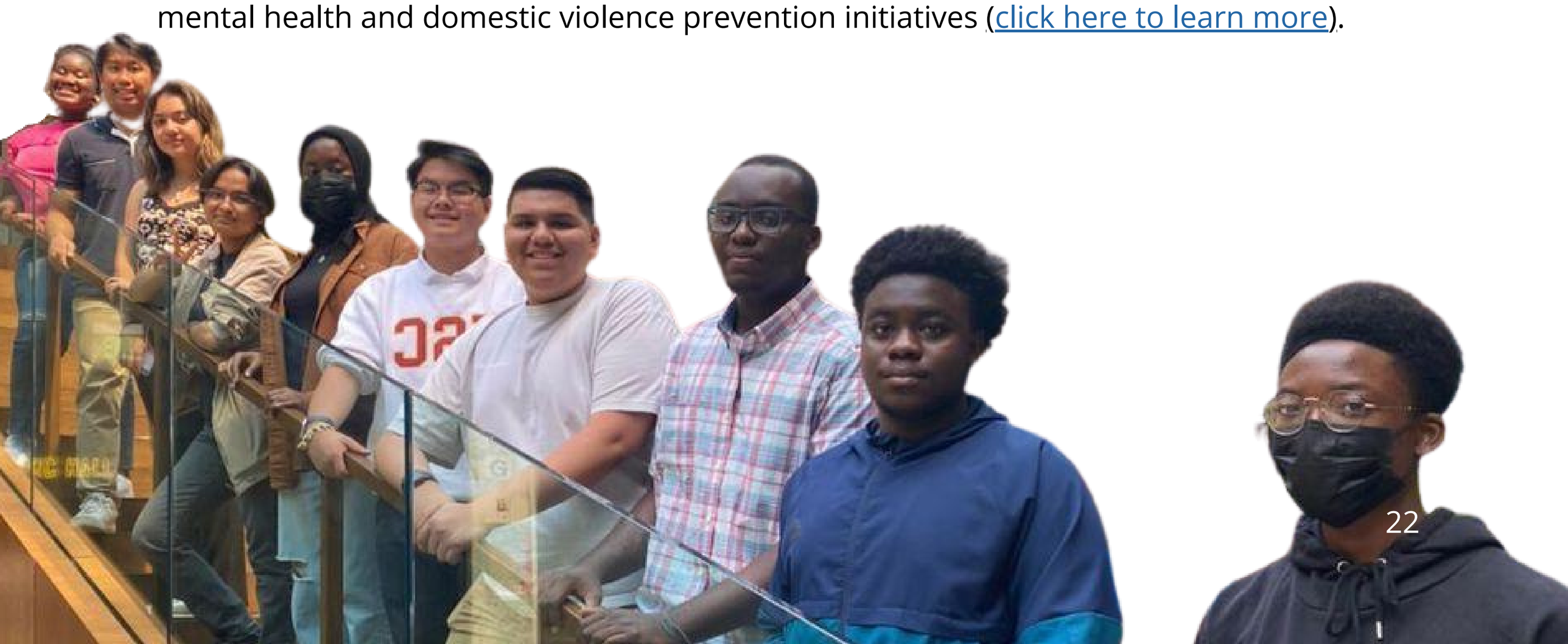
CFCI Priority: Mental Health

The City of Houston considers support of children's mental health essential for children to thrive and learn and create safer communities for children. The City of Houston supported the following articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) through their various public safety and mental health initiatives and in the implementation of the CFCI Action Plan:

- Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must work to provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment for children's health.
- Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical, social, and mental needs. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

The CFCI situational analysis identified these rights as priority areas in need for improvement in the City of Houston, specifically improving youth's access to mental health support. Youth ranked "awareness of mental health care" low and mentioned having difficulties figuring out how and who to talk to about their mental health challenges. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also found that only "20% of children with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders receive care from a specialized mental health care provider."

The CFCI Action Plan addressed this issue area by identifying and improving knowledge gaps in youth mental health and connecting youth to mental health support through the Be Well Be Connected program, service provider trainings, and other youth-led projects. These efforts form part of One Safe Houston, Mayor Turner's public safety initiative to combat violent crime and part of the City's effort to allocate $21 million of funding into mental health and domestic violence prevention initiatives (click here to learn more).



Priority 2: Few youth know how to access mental health supports

CFCI Goal Area 3: Equitable Social Services

Every child has access to quality essential social services.

Objective: Service providers know how to better support youth and young people know how to get mental health care services (such as counseling).

Target Group/Audience: Youth (ages 13-18 years) and Youth Service Provider



If we take action on these strategies…

- Community Building Strategies
  - Mobilize the general public to support youth's mental health
  - Youth Civic Engagement
- Child-Friendly Governance Strategies
  - Community-based partnerships for children

We will see these results for children…

- More trainings for service providers and community members to understand youth mental health
- Support for youth-led projects to bring awareness of mental health care and resources
- Partnerships to address mental health prevention and stigmatization

And we will impact children's lives through…

- Increased awareness of youth mental health issues and resources to support their well-being
- Increased awareness of mental health resources among youth and improved intergenerational communication
- Expand awareness and reach of youth programs in the arts and the outdoors

In Planning

In Progress

Completed

What strategies will we take action on?	What activities need to happen to realize this strategy?	Who is responsible for these activities?	What resources are needed?
Community Engagement	✓ Host 8 Youth Mental Health First Aid Trainings ✓ Host 3 "Adverse Childhood Experiences & Supporting Children from Traumatic Background" trainings ✓ Host Mindfulness and Self-care workshops for youth service providers ✓ Present School Mental Health Conference	• CFCI Program Manager • The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD • Texas Children's Hospital • Serenity Place, LLC • Center for School Behavioral Health Conference • Mental Health America of Greater Houston • Region 4 • Parks and Recreation Department	✓ Partnerships with mental health providers who can facilitate mental health trainings ✓ Paid interns who can support CFCI Program Manager in hosting and evaluating trainings
Youth Civic Engagement	✓ Youth-led panels focused on topics to improve emotional support and access to mental health resources ◔ Youth-led outreach campaign for emotional support line	• CFCI and Mayor's Youth Council • CFCI Program Manager • MOEYE Mental Health partners	✓ Gift cards as incentives for participation in workshop and trainings ✓ Stipends for youth facilitators

In Planning

In Progress

Completed

What strategies will we take action on?	What activities need to happen to realize this strategy?	Who is responsible for these activities?	What resources are needed?
Community-based Partnerships for Children	✓ Develop Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights ✓ Create content for CFCI Youth Mental Health Guide ✓ Develop art and cultural projects to promote CFCI Youth Mental Health Guide ✓ Integrate information of youth mental health into city emergency response and recovery	• GAC Resource Identification Subcommittee • Be Well Be Connected • The Bureau of Youth and Adolescent Health via the COH Health Department • Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) • Arts Connect Houston • Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs	✓ Collaboration time from city staff and key partners and stakeholders ✓ Coordination of virtual gatherings ✓ Partnership with Mental Health America Art Showcase for Youth Mental Health Guide

Mental Health Activities

Be Well Be Connected

Be Well, Be Connected (BWBC) is a 4-year mental health program Systems of Care SAMHSA-grant funded program, which began in September 2019. The program provides specialized coordinated care for youth, ages 9-17, residing in the Greater Houston Area who are facing severe emotional disturbances. BWBC offers a comprehensive array of services which include emotional and behavioral therapies, psychiatric consultation and medication management, peer support, and parents' reeducation. It is delivered by Baylor College of Medicine and is sponsored by the City of Houston. BWBC has supported CFCI by connecting with partnerships including the Harris Center for Mental Health and Mental Health of America- Houston (MHA-H), youth services, and advisory partners.

In addition, BWBC works with organizations to support the mental health of youth. In partnership with Mental Health of America-Houston, we promoted and sponsored Emotional Backpack Training to school counselors and other student-facing professionals. This training included topics such as child mental health, youth suicide prevention, trauma-informed classrooms: trauma 101, advanced trauma-informed classrooms: trauma 102, and self-care for educators. Both the CFCI and BWBC initiatives have had a significant impact on the community by bolstering the ability for youth and child-facing professionals to respond to youth mental health needs.

35

participants and their families were served with individual, family, and group therapy

350

mental health counselors working in 174 schools received Emotional Backpack Training

75

total professionals in the behavioral health field trained in three specialized training activities

garnering a potential impact of over

114,000

students residing in the Greater Houston Area.

Mental Health Activities

Youth Mental Health Trainings

Through the CFCI intergenerational workshops, youth and service providers determined that to support the emotional well-being of youth, adults must be trained on issues affecting youth mental health, learn how to support youth navigating these challenges, and know what resources are available to support the youth they serve.

The Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement identified and partnered with mental health providers and hosted the following trainings in collaboration:

1. Youth Mental Health First Aid - Harris Center
2. Adverse Childhood Experiences and Supporting Children from Traumatic Backgrounds - Texas Children's Hospital
3. Identifying Child Abuse and Maltreatment - Texas Children's Hospital
4. Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents - Texas Children's Hospital
5. Mindfulness and Self-Care – Serenity LLC

The MOEYE's goal was to increase access to these trainings and help educate and support service providers and community members working with youth. In 2022, the MOEYE conducted 21 trainings in youth mental health. The trainings hosted by the MOEYE have reached approximately **700 service providers, educators, community members, and parents**. Participants include nurses, Parks and Recreation staff, Houston Public Library staff, teachers, school administrators, after school program staff (i.e. YMCA), immigration advocates, and faith based/church staff and pastors. For more information on training, see press release linked here.



Flyer for Youth Mental Health First Aid Training hosted by MOEYE and facilitated by the Harris Center

Mental Health Activities

Youth Mental Health Trainings

Evaluation

- **Youth Mental Health First Aid -** Since these trainings have a smaller capacity, the MOEYE conducted a first round of focus groups after the trainings to receive feedback from participants. MOEYE aims to complete a second round of focus groups to learn more about how participants have applied the knowledge they gained in the trainings. A summary from the first round of focus groups can be found here.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences and Supporting Children from Traumatic Backgrounds -** Due to its larger capacity, the MOEYE conducted an evaluation survey to capture participants' experiences. We collected approximately 150 survey responses (see responses here). See details below and read more about participant experiences here.



Impact Statements from Participants

> *I found this training insightful. I work with children between the ages of 0-17, some of whom have suffered immense trauma. This training allowed me to learn and understand the mechanics of trauma in the body, and was also provided with strategies, references, and diagrams that were very useful.*

Mental Health Activities

Youth Mental Health Trainings

Impact Statement from Participants

Very dynamic and applicable information. Should be required training to all working with children and youth.

This training was amazing. Having the trainer share her real world experiences with us related to me so much. Talking about her son and showing up for him every day really struck a cord with me. Even when you don't feel like it, you have to show up. That is the best thing I took from this training.

It was very emotional for me because I have dealt with childhood trauma as well during my time as a teacher assistant, I encountered students who showed signs of trauma. After taking this training, I now feel better prepared on my journey becoming a school counselor.

Today was another "Great Day in Parks" as we say. Great training. I was a Court Appointed Child Advocate and I feel the training a great tool for anyone who works with children at a high-risk, Afro-Hispanic, urban Community Center like ours in historic Pleasantville. Thank you so much, I will stay in touch about our future programming in this area

Mental Health Activities



MYC and CFCI Youth Council Members after conducting a Mental Health In Schools Workshop

Mental Health In Schools - Youth-Led Workshops

To promote youth participation and encourage youth to voice their concerns about access to mental health supports, the Houston CFCI Youth Council developed and hosted “Mental Health in Schools: Youth-led discussion, by youth, for youth,” which addressed the CFCI Action Plan priorities. The objectives of these workshops were to facilitate a discussion about the impact of their experiences, collect data on students’ experience with mental health in schools, discuss current efforts in school districts, receive youth feedback, identify best ways for schools, the COH, and CFCI to better support youth mental health, and share mental health resources with youth participants

The workshops included opportunities for youth to share their opinions through online polling and small discussions in breakout rooms. The information gathered from these workshops will be used to inform educators and service providers on how to best facilitate access to mental health resources for youth in Houston schools. View full report on the three workshops conducted and data collected here.

Youth Impact Statements

> *I loved the interaction and the ability to give other youth an opportunity to speak their minds.*

> *I felt comforted because I was able to relate to what the youth were sharing about their struggles, and it made me feel less alone.*

Mental Health Activities

Critical Voices: Youth Mental Health in Schools - Student Panel



MYC and CFCI Youth Council Members and Laura Cuellar with Dr. Freeny and Andrea Fulgiam of Mental Health America of Greater Houston

The CFCI Youth and Mayor's Youth Councils conducted a student panel, "Critical Voices: Youth Mental Health in Schools," at the Center for School Behavioral Health and Mental Health America Conference in September 2022. The youth shared the research collected during the CFCI process and Mental Health In Schools workshops as well as their testimonies on challenges and best practices they have experienced when connecting to mental health support in school.

The youth presenters also shared recommendations on how schools can better support youth mental and emotional health. The presentation offered a space for meaningful collaboration between youth and adult attendees by providing a space for meaningful conversation to identify ways for youth and educators to work together on improving student wellness. To view the presentation, please click here.

Evaluation

Attendees shared their feedback in a short evaluation form, to view responses click here. When asked how they will apply the knowledge gained, they shared they would:

- Increase active listening; stop and talk to students who appear to be struggling
- Train more teachers on more effective and empathetic interactions
- Try to implement different ways for our students to have access to mental health information
- Equip counselors with training and tools to assist students where there is a deficit

Mental Health Activities

Training on Depression - For Youth by Youth

As part of the situational analysis, the MOEYE found that most mental health trainings are offered for educators and service providers, and very few are offered to youth. During the CFCI Intergenerational Committee meetings, youth advocated for including mental health education as part of the school curriculum.

After the "Critical Voices" student panel at the Center for School Behavioral Health (CSBH) Conference, Mental Health America of Greater Houston committed to partnering with MOEYE and the CFCI Youth Council to develop a youth mental health training, for youth and by youth. Under the direction of Dr. Freeney, Director of the CSBH, CFCI youth members are currently developing learning objectives and content for youth mental health trainings on depression. The objectives for the training were chosen by youth and include how to recognize signs and symptoms of depression and implement steps to take when yourself or a friend are showing signs of depression

These trainings will equip Houston youth with the skills and knowledge to improve their wellness and be the beginning of an effort to co-develop systems of mental health support alongside youth.

Youth Impact Statements

> *I can say that being able to learn how to research correct information from reliable mental health resources, creating our learning objectives, and listening to Dr. Freeney's wisdom in the mental health sector, has been one of my favorite parts of being a CFCI Youth Council Member. This opportunity to work hand in hand with such an amazing person who wants to amplify our voices on such an important topic such as depression in teens is an experience I'll never forget.*

Mental Health Activities

Youth Mental Health Guide

In response to improving access to mental health supports for youth, the MOEYE is developing a youth mental health guide for youth (16-24) on how to access mental health support and care. The guide provides information and resources for youth to reduce mental health stigma, connect to the appropriate mental health supports, and find resources and allies in the process.

The main objectives of the guide are to:

- Describe steps necessary to take care of their mental health
- Provide youth with language needed to receive the mental health support
- Aid in understanding stigma, screening tools, adult allies, and other best practices and common challenges to accessing mental health care

The MOEYE has assembled a working group of mental health professionals to review, provide feedback, and approve content of the guide. The working group includes mental health organizations, such as Texas Children's Hospital, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Greater Houston, the Harris Center, Houston OCD & Anxiety PLLC, and the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department.

Additionally, the guide will include art and illustrations created by youth to make the content more accessible to youth and families. Art has been proven to help reduce anxiety and stress and improve youth wellness. The guide will be completed in 2023. To view the current draft of the mental health, guide click here.

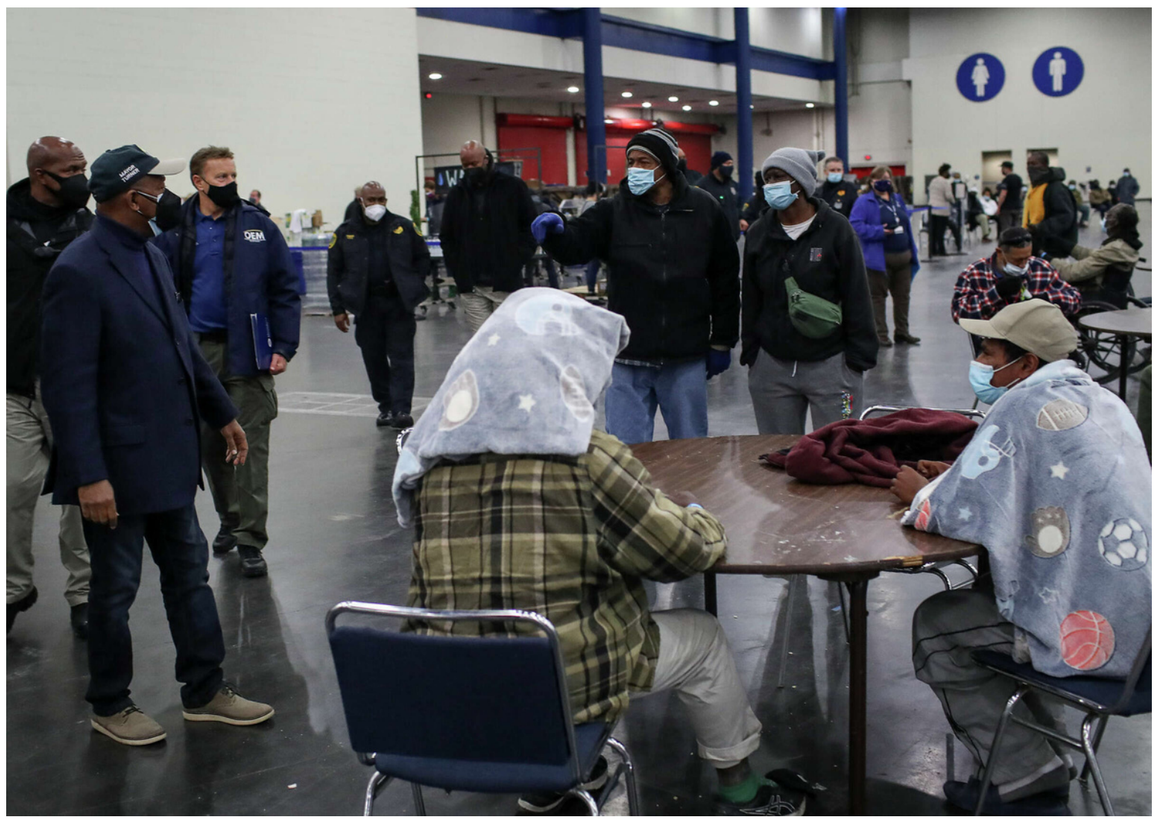


Comic strip from Youth Mental Health Guide created by CFCI Youth Council member

PART 4

Emergency Prep

CFCI Priority:
Emergency Prep and Resource Accessibility



Mayor Turner at the George R. Brown Convention Center converted into a warming center

COH's commitment to public safety, equity, resilience, and sustainability is reflected in the following articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

- Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical, social, and mental needs.
- Every child has the right to life.

The CFCI process identified these rights as areas in need of improvement in the City of Houston, especially during times of emergency and natural disaster. The CFCI situational analysis highlighted children's increased vulnerability in the face of emergencies and shed light on the need for child-centered emergency preparedness information and improved resource accessibility before, during, and after emergencies.

Increasing accessibility to safe living environments that meet both youth, community, and city needs has been a pillar of various City of Houston strategic plans including One Safe Houston and Resilient Houston, the City's comprehensive resilience strategy. The Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement aims to address emergency preparedness and resource accessibility through communication campaigns and youth participation programs, such as Hire Houston Youth and the Out 2 Learn Youth Leaders program. These projects aim to improve access to jobs, basic needs, and emergency preparedness information for youth ages 13-18.

Priority 3: Need for youth emergency preparedness

CFCI Goal Area 4: Safe Living Environments

Every child lives in a safe, secure and clean environment.

Objective: If there is an emergency or hazard in the community, young people know what to do and where to find the resources they need.

Target Group/Audience: Youth (ages 13-18 years) and Youth Service Providers



If we take action on these strategies…

- Community Building Strategies
  - Community-based partnerships for children
  - Public and Youth Engagement
- Child-Friendly Governance Strategies
  - Create a Child Friendly Emergency Plan

We will see these results for children…

- Collaborations between youth and city leaders to better present and disseminate resource information
- Discussions engaging young people in emergency preparation, recovery, and response activities
- Development of Standard Operating Procedures for Children in Emergencies

And we will impact children's lives through…

- Improved understanding of resources available and needed by youth
- Increased youth involvement and interest in emergency preparation
- Improved emergency response and disaster relief for children

In Planning

In Progress

Completed

What strategies will we take action on?	What activities need to happen to realize this strategy?	Who is responsible for these activities?	What resources are needed?
Child Friendly Governance Strategies	✓ Collaborative meetings to develop Children's Emergency Plan with Key Stakeholders ✓ Create report and presentation regarding findings of the CFCI Emergency Preparedness Teen Survey	• CFCI Program Manager • COH Office of Emergency Management • Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management • Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response • United Way • UNICEF USA	✓ Collaboration time from county, city staff, and key stakeholders ✓ Part-time Emergency Prep Intern
Community-based Partnerships for Children	✓ Conduct Out 2 Learn Outreach ✓ Promote Hire Houston Youth job board and resources ✓ Update resource page in MOE website … Promote youth guide for navigating mental health care systems	• Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement • Hire Houston Youth • Governance Advisory Council (GAC) Resource Identification Subcommittee • United Way • Out 2 Learn	✓ Collaboration time from county, city staff, and key stakeholders ✓ Funding to promote the CFCI Youth Mental Health Guide widely

In Planning

In Progress

Completed

What strategies will we take action on?	What activities need to happen to realize this strategy?	Who is responsible for these activities?	What resources are needed?
Civic Engagement	✓ Conduct CFCI Emergency Preparedness Teen Survey ✓ Youth research for Out 2 Learn Outreach Project ✓ Youth meetings to evaluate resource-sharing tools	• CFCI Youth Council • Mayor's Youth Council • Youth Programs (i.e. Girls, Inc., YMCA) • Out 2 Learn • ProUnitas Inc.	✓ Collaboration time from county, city staff, and key stakeholders ✓ Stipends or in-kind donations for youth participation ✓ Funding for promotional activities of the CFCI Youth Mental Health Guide

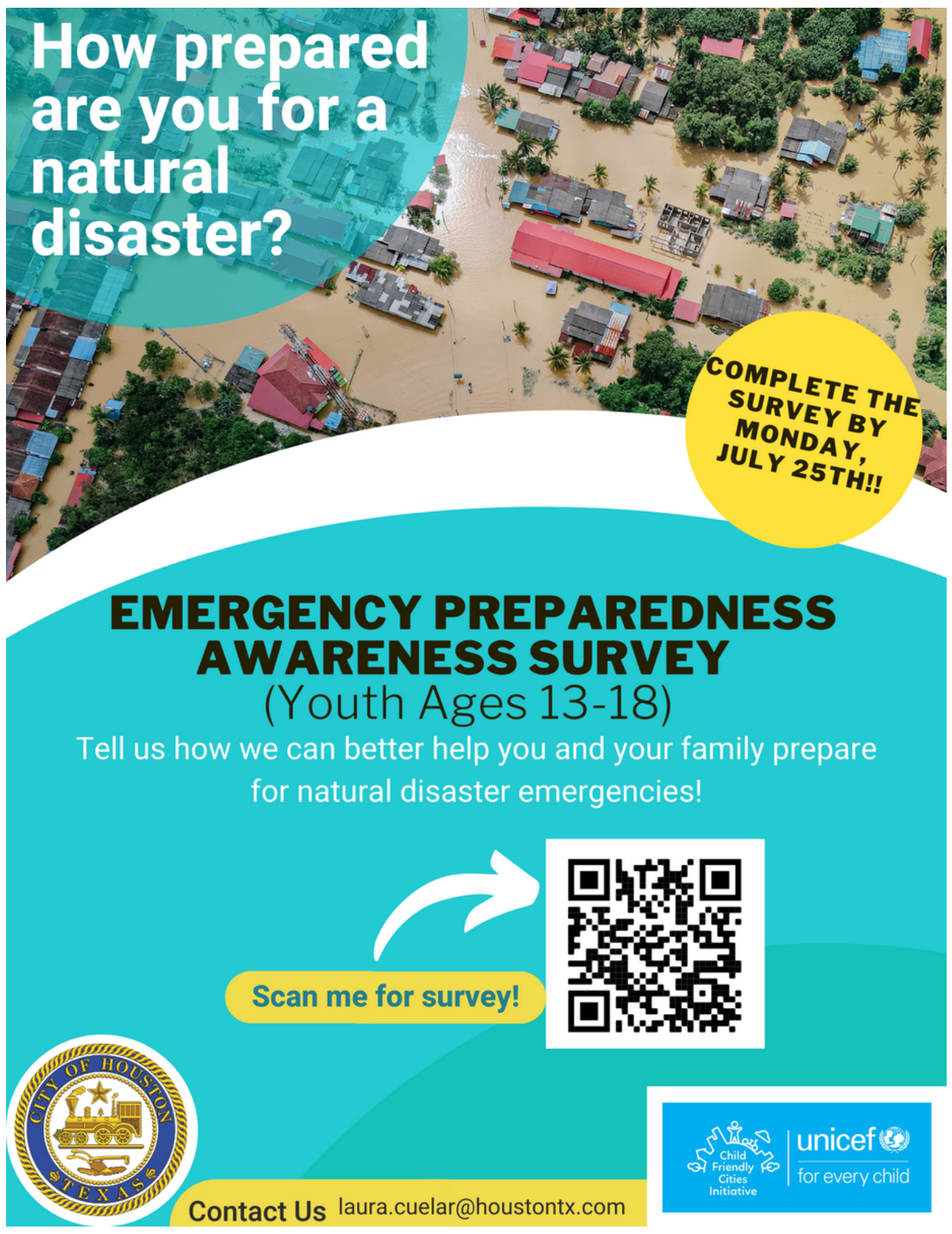
Emergency Prep Activities

CFCI Teen Emergency Preparedness Pilot Survey

MOEYE created an emergency preparedness pilot survey to gain greater understanding of Houston's youth level of preparedness and identify specific areas of need around disaster preparation, response, and recovery. The pilot survey circulated for two weeks during the summer of 2022 and was distributed via email to the Mayor's and CFCI youth councils and the CFCI Youth Ambassadors. The survey obtained 44 total responses across the greater Houston area. The survey results were presented to city and county leaders in emergency management, to view presentation click here.

During the presentation the MOEYE presented recommendations to strengthen emergency preparedness among youth and gathered feedback from attendees on next steps. An important next step that was highlighted was the importance of communication campaigns and resources that include content that is attractive, relevant, and culturally and age appropriate to children and youth.

The MOEYE also composed the CFCI Emergency Preparedness Report based on the CFCI Emergency Preparedness Survey findings and the CFCI situational analysis. The report shares MOEYE's findings on teen emergency preparation from the CFCI Youth Voice Workshops, and student and teacher focus groups on the Teen Cert Program, one of the few emergency preparation programs for youth in Houston. The knowledge gathered from the survey can be used by city leaders and service providers to create an emergency preparedness plan for children and help youth feel safer and more prepared during emergencies.



Flyer used in promoting CFCI Emergency Preparedness Survey

Emergency Prep Activities

Children and Youth Communications Campaign

MOEYE facilitated an emergency preparedness communication campaign to increase youth participation in emergency preparedness and provide youth friendly information and resources. The campaign is youth-led and seeks to address the information gaps identified from the Teen Emergency Preparedness Pilot Survey. The CFCI youth leaders participated through the creation of infographics, videos and presentations.

The MOEYE is working in collaboration with the City of Houston and Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and other youth emergency preparedness stakeholders to help promote the materials created through social media channels, city websites, and other online sources.

Infographics

Part of the MOEYE's communication campaign will include infographics with visual aids, resources, tips and statistics about various emergency and natural disaster topics. The infographics will help children and youth understand complex concepts with illustrations and easily digestible information. The infographics were created by members of the CFCI Emergency Preparation committee. City and community departments/organizations, as well as youth committee members, will help disseminate infographics in community centers, after-school programs, schools, and through social media channels. To view links of infographics created by youth click here.





Youth at Houston City Council Meeting, February 15, 2023

Emergency Prep Activities

Children and Youth Communications Campaign

Infographics

Emergency Phone Numbers You Need to Know

If you are at risk of having an emergency, here is a list of emergency phone numbers ready to use.



Houston Police Department

911



American Red Cross

(866) 526-8300



Disaster Distress Helpline

(800) 985-5990



United Way

211

City of Houston
Mayor's Office of Education
and Youth Engagement

Child Friendly Cities Initiative | unicef for every child

Two of the infographics created by CFCI youth ambassadors for the MOEYE emergency preparedness communication campaign

Emergency Prep Activities

Children and Youth Communications Campaign

Video Contest

MOEYE created a youth video contest campaign to include teens in the creative process of disseminating emergency preparedness information, making content for youth by youth. The campaign aims to expose youth, ages 13-18, to the video making and researching processes with regards to emergency preparation and mitigation in the city. The contest is awarding prizes to the top three videos in order to recognize youth for their creativity and research into the subject.

The goals of the Youth Video Contest Campaign are:

- Expose youth to creating and editing videos and fully utilize their creativity to put together a fun and informational communications campaign for youth.
- Give the opportunity to youth to research emergency preparedness topics and present accurate information to their peers.
- Reward youth for their efforts in learning more about emergencies and natural disasters in the City of Houston and how to prepare, respond, and recover from them.

The MOEYE will be working with various city and community departments/organizations as well as youth committee members to share videos to various social media channels.



Flyer promoting the Youth Emergency Preparedness Video Contest

Resource Accessibility Activities

Hire Houston Youth

In 2016, Hire Houston Youth (HHY) was launched through the Mayor's Office of Education, the first city-wide, collective impact postsecondary and workforce effort bringing together hundreds of employers from the City of Houston and the wider community. Since its inception, HHY has impacted the lives of over 40,000 young Houstonians by linking them to job and internship opportunities. In 2022 HHY partnered with 524 employers to provide over 14,000 available jobs for youth surpassing Mayor Turner's jobs goal of 12,000. Through HHY youth are offered eight-weeks paid summer jobs and internships at the City of Houston, the public, private, and philanthropic sectors.

Through HHY, the MOEYE launched a zip-code based resource search engine on the HHY website to help support youth beyond their internship. This feature allows youth to connect directly with community-based organizations and service providers to find basic need resources such as transportation, meals, health etc.

In 2022, 25 HHY participants categorized as 'At Risk' or youth with minor criminal background, were offered scholarships to obtain Sales Academy certification which increases the chances for these youth to pursue a career in sales.

Additionally, in collaboration with National League of Cities and its $150,000 financial and technical assistance award, HHY carried out the city's efforts to expand STEM career pathways for marginalized young people. The HouSTEM in development, is a public-private partnership that assists youth and young adults prepare for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by supporting the coordination of existing yet disconnected Houston STEM initiatives and programs. Mayor Turner also included Hire Houston Youth in his One Safe Houston crime reduction campaign.



Mayor Turner meeting youth at HHY Event

Resource Accessibility Activities



Mayor Turner Reading to Group of Children

Out 2 Learn Youth Leaders Project

The Out 2 Learn (O2L) Youth Leaders Project (YLP) at the MOEYE is a one-semester ambassador and leadership project for middle and high school students in Greater Houston. The YLP brings together community-oriented youth who recognize the value of out-of-school time (OST) programming and are committed to promoting equity and increasing accessibility to these services for all Houston families. Initiated in 2017, O2L works to expand access to high-quality OST services to all families in the Greater Houston region through a coordinated, youth-centered approach to professional development, community investment, and community awareness of the importance of quality services and youth voice. The efforts of O2L are led by Houston Endowment alongside the City of Houston MOEYE, Harris County Department of Education's CASE for Kids, and United Way of Greater Houston.

The primary objective of the YLP is to revitalize and grow the O2L comprehensive database of OST programs in Greater Houston, with the secondary objective being the empowerment of youth to better understand the unequal allocation of resources and services in the city by identifying OST deserts across Greater Houston.

Participants conduct online research to identify OST programs in Greater Houston to assist O2L in bouncing back to its pre-pandemic success levels. In addition, youth are asked to concentrate on identifying low- or no-cost OST programs in historically underserved communities and receive coaching from MOEYE staff throughout the project, which lasts approximately 14 weeks.

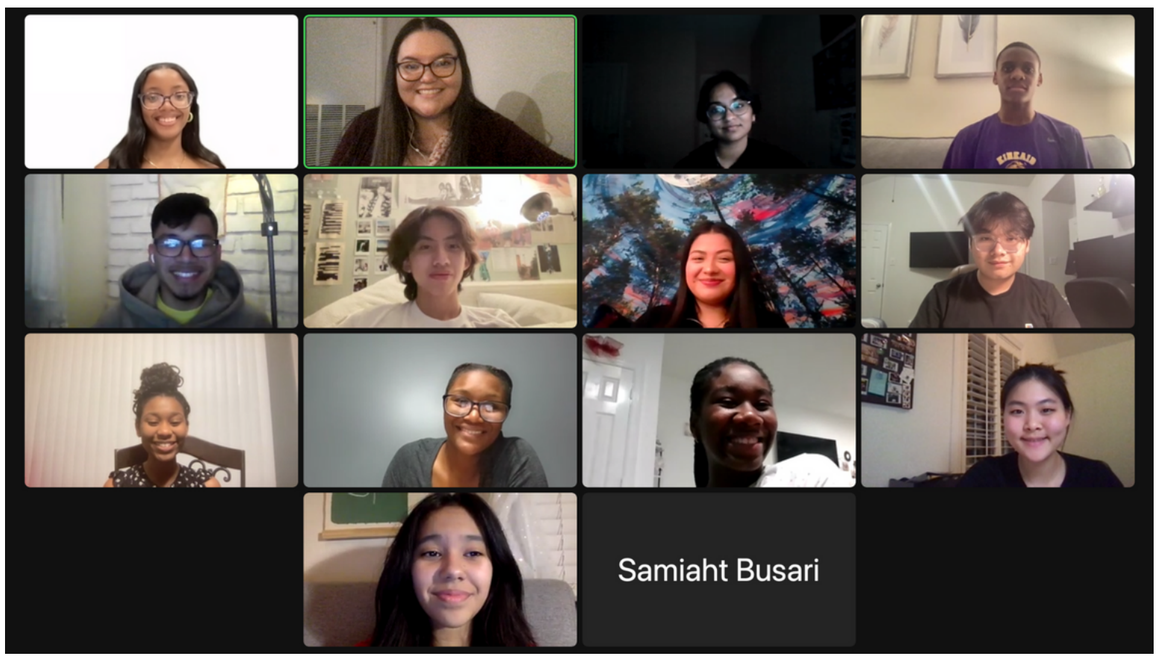
Resource Accessibility Activities

Accomplishments

The pilot version of the YLP was launched in June 2022 and attracted a total of 14 youths between the ages of 14-21 (eighth-graders to college students) and two community adult volunteers who work in youth-serving programs across Greater Houston. By the end of the 14-week pilot, the summer 2022 cohort of the YLP identified and updated information for 277 OST programs, far exceeding the initial expectations for the project and demonstrating the benefits of involving youth in O2L's work. This significant progress achieved by the YLP participants confirmed the commitment and willingness of youth to serve their community and push their city closer to an equitable and fairer Houston for every child and young person.

> *Participating in the O2L Youth Leaders Project was eye-opening as I learned of the various out-of-school time programs Houston offers its residents. Our guides, Daniella and Fernanda, were of amazing help, and their kindness was shown throughout the project. I am thankful to have been entrusted to complete these assignments and contribute both to O2L and CFCI.*

As a result of the meaningful contributions of the summer 2022 cohort of the YLP, the MOEYE and United Way of Greater Houston elected to continue the project beyond the pilot phase. Wanting to include more students from diverse backgrounds in future cohorts, the MOEYE applied for and received a $16,000 grant from the Houston Endowment to issue honorariums of $500 to active participants of the YLP, among other programmatic expenses. The honorariums will also be given retroactively to youth volunteers from the summer 2022 cohort.



Fernanda Marrero Hi, Youth Engagement Manager, MOEYE Intern, with O2L Youth Leaders

Appendix

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Olivera Jankovska, Mayor's Office Director of Education & Youth Engagement

CFCI Leadership Team

Mayor's Office of Education
Olivera Jankovska
Jessica McGowan
Fernanda Marrero Hi
Jo-Anne Reed
Laura Cuellar

Mayor's Office of Complete Communities
Shannon Buggs

Mayor's Office of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence
Minal Davis
Chris Graves

Mayor's Office of Trade and International Affairs
Chris Olson
Jessica Ngo

Mayor's Office of New Americans
Benito Juarez

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Paul Green

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Debra Lathan
Nikia Lewis

Houston Public Library
LaTrisha Milton

Mayor's Office of Resilience and Sustainability
Priya Zachariah

Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs
Necole Irving

CFCI Taskforce

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Deborah Lugo

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Christopher Greely, M.D.
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Jaime Gonzalez

University of Houston College of Education
Dr. Catherine Horn

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Margaret Oser

UNICEF USA

Michael J. Nyenhuis
Nelson Bowman
Danielle Goldberg
Amber Stone
Maryann Wanjau
Rimsha Sayed

MOEYE Interns

Ashley Scott
Cristina Manning
Daniella Jacob
David Ramirez
Gabriela Davila
Jennifer Hamad
Kaschondralynn Brown
Maria Teresa Calderon
Ngombi Danielle Lossangoye
Ron Reis
Sebastian Injac
Winnie Pham

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Angelina Brown Hudson
Ally Segura
Diane Kaulen
Iris Lewis
Dr. Jamie Freeny
Lauren Williams
Nicole Kwan
Nikki Banneyer

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COBOR

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Jaime Gonzalez
Kaila Williams
Kelli Ondracek
Lisa Gianukos
Luis Guajardo
Marsha Towns
Melissa Turbaugh
Nikia Lewis
Paul Green
Rebecca Luman
Robyn Kebede
Sarah Coles
Shreya Thakekar
Tara Stafford Ocansey
Treasa Antony
Valeria Casas

MOEYE Partners

Ana Leyva
Andrea Fulgiam Thurston
Danelis Rodriguez
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Ivy Hiner
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Krystal Perez
Liliana Gonzalez
Laura Yeagar
Maggie Stern
Maryam Osman
Ololade Yerokun
Rachel Myles
Thu Kim Nguyen
Roselia Banuelos

CFCI Youth Leaders

Abdulkader Almosa
Adedamola Adejumobi
Adeline Nguyen
Aidan Vu
A'keisha Bickham
Alexander Hernandez
Alexavier Mendoza
Alishba Khan
Ameedah Adeyinka
Aneefah Babs-Kazeem
Angel Castillo
Anika Shethia
Asia Griffin
Austin Gray
Autumn Sampson
Bella Kalra
Carmen Reisdorf
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Christina Aramburu
David Reisdorf
Divinegift Dike
Edward Lopez
Elvis Eze
Emma Xi
Erik Lara
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Hope Faith Wiggins
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Jaanak Prashar
Jade Jimenez
Jordyn Wright
Julius Rodriguez
Jumahri Haynes
Kate-Yeonjae Jeng
Katherine Ramos
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Lauren Seghers
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Lilibeth Gonzalez-Gomez
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Matthew Jeong
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Chinh Le
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Nicole Young
Nolan Tran
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Quynh Ngo
Radiya Almosa
Rebeca Escobar
Riana Bhattacharjee
Richard Wang
River Izabella Lopez
Joseph Orekoya
Juan (Mateo) Aguirre
Julia Ines Ventura
Samiaht Busari
Saniya Scott
Sawsan Busari
Scotia Linn
Semaj Martin
Serene Aamer
Shania "Shay“ Vensel
Sheralyn Cruz
Shonn Huang
Sofiah Ahmad
Susan Tran
Mmesoma Atani
Mujeebat Gbolahan
Natalie Fashoro
Takori Bradford
Tara Pellerin
Tata Traore
Trisha Botcha
Tyler Nguyen
Vratin Mankidy
Yara Kirkwood
Zayna Irshad

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Harris County Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response
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Houston Public Library
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Mayor’s Youth Council
Mental Health America of Greater Houston
NAMI of Greater Houston
The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD
United Way
YMCA Greater Houston

CITY OF HOUSTON MAYOR'S OFFICE

EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Empowering from Cradle to Career

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