

Overview

Boston Youth Organizing Project is a youth-led organization supported by adults, with a common purpose to increase youth power and create positive social change. BYOP goals are to improve the lives of young people, increase real political participation and build community.

Mission

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, regardless of age, race, gender, class, sexuality, geography, citizenship status, and other qualities that often divide us. We believe that all people have certain unalienable rights, that among these are a life free of violence; a high-quality, respectful education that prepares us for our next steps; safe, adequate places to pursue recreation, and activities which develop our skills for our futures. BYOP is an organization of young leaders designed to pursue, establish and protect these truths and rights as necessary.” – BYOP website



Constituency

- Youth of color

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Boston

Massive Public School Budget Shortfalls

Resulting in school closures and loss of teaching staff, librarians, nurses, school transportation, etc.

Battle between Public Schools & Charter Schools

Unhealthy School Lunches and Lack of Quality Drinking Water in Schools

Increasing Numbers of Homeless Youth & Children

Child Hunger

Unaffordable Public Transportation for Families & Youth

Youth Exposure to Violence

Including early childhood trauma (0 to 5).

Lack of Intentional Youth Involvement

Including youth underrepresentation and participation in discussions and decisions related to their education and employment opportunities.

Lack of Youth Employment Opportunities

Police Brutality, Misconduct & Violence

Lack of Access to Quality, Affordable Child Care

Including barriers to public vouchers for child care and closures of family operated day care centers.

“The [school] resources that were taken away are resources that will [result in loss of accreditation for] your school. So, things like libraries, you can’t have an accredited school without librarians. Things like your nurses...the point of primary care for your whole family comes through your school and a nurse, and those people are now gone... The yellow buses [transportation], you know got taken away for middle schoolers, so we now have more middle schoolers just out there in the streets after school... they’re getting arrested, they’re young people of color.”

–Najma Nazyat, Lead Organizer & Director

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

Ongoing youth-led public outreach campaign related to reforming and protecting public school education (i.e., public vs. charter schools); this includes strategic coalition building with local and statewide teachers’ unions.

BYOP Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

Stronger Public Schools—supported and won a statewide ballot that prevented the expansion of charter schools and the associated decrease in resources for public schools (“Save our Public Schools/No on 2” Campaign).

Youth Transportation Access—secured free monthly MBTA bus passes for public school students.

“Because [every] child 0-5 in our community usually [does] have an older sibling and usually [does] have these caretakers...Young people, too, are parents [and] in school. It’s changed lives in the sense that young people can get to their job, they can take their child to their health care. Because in Massachusetts, if you’re 0-5, you ride for free with the big person who has the pass. So if you’re a teenager, you can take your little brother or sister to the hospital if your mom can’t...because there’s now a youth pass that’s going to get you around any time of day, it’s not restricted. I cannot say how important this is and how much people are using it.” – Najma Nazyat, Lead Organizer & Director

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Boston

Black women are twice as likely as White women to have a **low birth weight** baby.¹



51.6% of Latino and 40.2% of Black children (10-17) are **overweight/obese**.¹

17%

of WIC children ages 2-5 are **obese**. Children ages 0-5 enrolled in WIC are primarily Latino (39%) and Black (37%).¹



Black and Latino children ages 3-5 had higher emergency room visits for **asthma** than White and Asian children.¹

27%

of children in Boston live in **poverty**.¹



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

- **Developing youth to lead.** BYOP trains, pays, and supports young people to become community organizers. The youth leaders are thus able to: 1) grow their connections with other youth “who look like them”; 2) develop other youth into leaders, leading to greater youth involvement (expansive youth network); and 3) successfully engage in youth-adult partnerships to work on programs and policies affecting youth.
- **Youth-led meetings.** These serve as a space for youth to strengthen their relationships, provide accurate information and analysis on key issues (e.g., school budgets) affecting youth, and generate ideas to accomplish meaningful change.
- **Youth take action.** BYOP youth take the lead in action research/investigation, outreach, public education, and advocacy efforts.

“In youth work there’s also this magic. I don’t know how to define it...we’re not going to just you know say “oh it’s okay you don’t know how to do this,” were going say “it’s okay you don’t know how to do this, but what do you know how to do?” We’re going to identify what you know how to do, you’re going to be the best at that and you’re going to train somebody else...it’s magic.” – Pheonix Cindy Printemps, BYOP staff

Allies Working on Children’s Health

- Boston Student Advisory Council, Boston, MA - <http://www.youthonboard.org/bsac>



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 **the praxis project**

1. Shah, SN, Dodds, D, Dooley, D, Sims, PD, Ayanian, H, Batra, N, Fossa, A O'Malley, SE, Pokhrel, D Russo, E, Taher, R, Thomsen-Ferreira, S, Young, M, Zhao, J. (2015). Health of Boston 2014-2015: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office Boston, Massachusetts.