



# THE TRUST PROJECT FINAL REPORT



## Driving Youth Wellness: The TRUST Project's Journey Through Systems-Level Engagement

The TRUST Project aimed to take a systems-level approach to engage young people, ages 12-18, in responsive, evidence-based teen prevention programming to support optimal health. Our chosen curriculum, The Dibble Institute's Love Notes EBP, was wildly accepted by the youth in our program and our community-based organization partners. Launched in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we successfully navigated mazes of challenges to program delivery and achieved our goals and objectives. The TRUST Project celebrated numerous milestones and gleaned invaluable insights, revealing five areas of notable learning and impact:



## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS & INSIGHTS

1. Integrating Programs into Youth-Serving Systems
2. Uplifting Community Organizations: A Partner Spotlight
3. Scaling Responsive Youth Programs: A Collaborative Program Model
4. Elevating Youth Voice through Community Art
5. Connecting Youth to Support Services



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# INTRODUCTION

Since 1981, PRO Youth & Families (PRO) has engaged youth in opportunities that inspire hope. PRO has partnered with: **schools**, **local government**, and **other community-based organizations** to connect youth in the Greater Sacramento region with **positive youth development programs** to foster wellness and uplift youth voice. Building on this work, PRO implemented its TRUST Project from July 2020 to December 2023.



The TRUST Project's goal was to **empower justice-involved youth**, ages 12 to 18, to **achieve optimal health**, resulting in **reduced rates of adolescent pregnancy and STIs**. The project aimed to strengthen existing and develop new partnerships with youth-serving entities, and to develop more intentional integration of programming to foster sustainable, collective impact. Through this collaboration, the approach sought to increase access and enhance cultural responsiveness of evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programming, amplify youth voice, and facilitate more seamless connections to support services.

## ABOUT PRO YOUTH & FAMILIES

PRO Youth & Families, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, is dedicated to inspiring, educating, and mobilizing young people to build a healthier future for themselves, their families, and their communities. We envision a future where all young people **recognize their value**, have access to **support and opportunities**, and believe in their power to be **change-agents in their community**.

The organization is guided by the core values of putting youth first, fostering a sense of belonging, promoting collaboration, and instilling hope. **Our current work focuses on three key areas: 1) youth wellness; 2) amplifying youth voice; and 3) collective impact – all core components of the TRUST project.** Across our various initiatives, PRO served more than 3,000 youth in partnership with more than 40 youth-serving entities in 2023.



# 1 INTEGRATING TRUST PROGRAMMING INTO EXISTING SYSTEMS

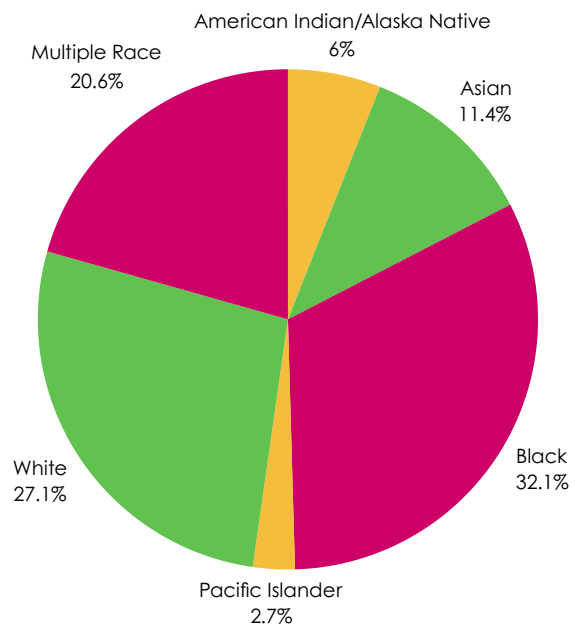
The TRUST Project originally intended to integrate EBP programming within juvenile justice systems. PRO and our CBO partners had relationships with the Placer County and Sacramento County juvenile justice systems. However, in addition to challenges from the pandemic restrictions that proved to be huge barriers to serving incarcerated youth, California changed policies around juvenile incarceration, which focused on quickly moving incarcerated youth out of detention facilities. Staying within these systems would have led to continuous limited reach and to high turnover rates.

*“My favorite parts about the program were being able to hear my peers’ opinions and also learn new things about myself.”*  
**Youth Participant**

PRO looked for opportunities to integrate the TRUST Project into other systems that could provide greater reach and continuity. As COVID-19 shutdown orders began to lift and schools in our region returned to in-person learning in the 2021-2022 school year, schools worked to support their students with social-emotional needs, especially their most vulnerable youth.

PRO partnered with the lead Gang Interventionist Specialist for Sacramento City Unified School District’s Safe Schools Initiative in Spring 2022. Through Safe Schools, PRO connected with site staff to integrate TRUST programming into **intervention and restorative justice programs**, as well as **life skills and leadership classes**.

## “About Me” Survey Demographics



# of unique sites:	34
# of youth served overall:	1,638
# of youth served in year 3:	1,281

*“The young men shared that they never knew they could share their feelings on a group level because there was never an environment for that.”*  
**Miguel Campos, Luther Burbank High School Administrator**

These staff members recognized the value of having additional support through our youth development professionals who could offer this programming as opposed to school staff. In working alongside these sites, TRUST Project facilitators **fostered safe spaces for youth engagement** by providing a trusted adult who **reflected their diversity and lived experiences**, while school staff supported **the recruitment and retention** of youth in programs.



This model, which began with one school site, eventually scaled to **15 different school sites across three school districts**. Our ability to integrate into these existing systems helped us significantly increase the reach and continuity of our programming and achieve our reach objectives. As our partnerships were forged with Title 1 and alternative schools, PRO continued to **successfully engage justice-involved youth and youth populations most at-risk for teen pregnancy and sexual-risk behaviors**.

## 2 UPLIFTING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS: A PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Led by Rolanda Wilkins, Earth Mama Healing Network, Inc. (EMH) is a grassroots nonprofit organization committed to providing young African American females with the support they need to **thrive, succeed, and lead fulfilling lives**, while also contributing positively to the **growth and empowerment of the African American community**. EMH's youth development approach centers around empowerment through self-activation, holistic wellness, cultural empowerment, leadership development, and community engagement.

EMH was identified as a partner in the proposal phase of the TRUST Project and contributed to the development and the design of the project. EMH was working in several middle, high, and alternative schools, as well as in the Sacramento County Juvenile Justice Detention Center, with female populations.



EMH's service delivery was also impacted by COVID-19 in the Project's first year. However, as schools in Sacramento returned to in-person instruction in the 2021-2022 school year, EMH leveraged their existing relationships with school sites and immediately began program implementation. Over the course of the project, EMH hosted **43 program cohorts**, reaching **more than 800 youth**. The TRUST Project benefited from EMH's connections with the target population and their ability to implement **culturally responsive and relevant programming**.

*"We prepare y'all for a lot of things, except for the most important things: how you **communicate with yourself and with other people.**"*  
**Rolanda Wilkins, Director of EMH**

# of youth served overall:	863	# of youth served at Sac JDF:	60
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We encountered some challenges, especially with regards to evaluation and data collection. Both organizations dedicated resources to work through processes, systems, and tools to minimize barriers and increase efficacy of data collection. Valuable lessons were learned that strengthened PRO's approach to collaborative infrastructure and shared evaluation. PRO adapted to partner's needs and abilities versus focusing on PRO's internal systems and efficiencies. PRO realized the importance of "partner-friendly" tools and systems, which resulted in increased quantity and quality of collected data.

## CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

In the last year of the grant, EMH integrated **Caregiver Engagement** into their service offerings for the TRUST Project. EMH connected with their **youths' caregivers** through **phone calls** or **home visits**. The visits provided EMH an opportunity to talk with caregivers about the TRUST Project's curriculum, goals, and objectives. EMH provided **space for caregivers** to provide feedback, ask clarifying questions, and, if needed, strategize together to develop a plan to keep their child engaged to support program completion.

Resources to youth and families included:



**Academic support**



**Community clinics**



**Food banks**

*In just one year, EMH completed **112 phone calls/home visits** and made **155 referrals** to other programs and services.*

# 3

## SCALING RESPONSIVE YOUTH PROGRAMS: A COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM MODEL



To advance equity and support cultural responsiveness, the TRUST Project partnered with **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)** to implement and scale the delivery of evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programming. Sacramento is home to a **diverse array** of CBOs led by individuals **deeply rooted in their communities** and reflect the **diversity** and **lived experiences** of youth served.

*"I learned so much... This program actually helped me get out of a relationship I had no business being in and it helped me learn my self-worth."*

**Youth Participant, YES! Program**

While PRO successfully engaged EMH throughout the project, it encountered challenges in developing and maintaining partnerships with other CBOs. PRO navigated challenges such as managing partner expectations, and streamlining administrative and evaluation processes required for federal funding. PRO discovered a need for a collaborative approach that provided a strong shared infrastructure while also prioritizing autonomy for CBOs to stay true to their mission while authentically responding to the needs of their youth.

PRO ultimately succeeded in developing a collaborative program model, **the Youth Engagement Squad (YES!)**, that engaged a **diverse array** of CBOs. In Spring 2023, PRO partnered with **eight CBOs** to serve **130 youth**.

8

CBOs

130

youth served

2,600

service project hours

YES! was designed based on a successful COVID-19 relief program, #SacYouthWorks (#SYW), developed in partnership with the City of Sacramento. #SYW partnered with CBOs to engage youth in a **40-hour work-based learning program** consisting of **training** and an **applied work/service-learning project**. PRO wondered if this model could work for the TRUST Project to address TPP/STI prevention, implement evidence-based programming with quality and fidelity, and meet the demands of federal evaluation and administrative requirements.

## YOUTH IMPACT

98%

would recommend YES! to a friend

100%

learned how to build strong relationships

71%

learned how to identify a trusted adult

*“The experience allowed us to put more tools in our toolbox to work with youth, and find multiple ways to actually deliver information we want our youth to receive.”*  
YES! CBO Partner

YES! partnered with CBOs to guide youth through **20 hours of Love Notes EBP curriculum** and a **20-hour service-learning project** that empowered youth to **voice how optimal health could be addressed** in their communities. CBO partners were certified to deliver the EBP directly to their youth, and the service-learning projects allowed for the integration of **authentic, culturally responsive program components unique to their mission**. YES! demonstrated positive impacts for youth and supported capacity-building of CBOs to help youth foster **healthy relationships and address sexual and reproductive health**.

## COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION IMPACT

100%

would continue to partner to deliver YES!

100%

would recommend partnering to other CBOs

71%

felt that YES! helped their organization grow\*

\*stronger network/relationships and more business/operations skills

*“Speaking to youth about topics like this is so important in this time and age.”*  
YES! CBO Partner

# 4 ELEVATING YOUTH VOICE THROUGH COMMUNITY ART

In the beginning of the TRUST Project, PRO engaged youth in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Project to **support meaningful engagement in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the project**. The YPAR provided youth an opportunity to dive into the term “optimal health” and what this meant for them and their community. During this project, youth continuously voiced that, to them, **efforts should be made to make their communities more beautiful**.



**150 youth** *participated in mural projects.*



From there, we developed the mural project idea where we engaged youth in the **conceptualization and construction of murals within their community**. Initially, we planned to select spaces within the Greater Sacramento region and bring youth to them to complete the murals. However, transportation proved to be difficult. PRO leveraged our connections with the school sites to paint the murals directly at school campuses, which solved the transportation issue and allowed the youth to be more hands-on. PRO integrated **youth voice** through the entire mural creation process. PRO would present an overall theme for the mural, and **youth brainstormed ideas for the artist to conceptualize**. Youth would then vote on the final design. The artist would design the mural as a “paint by number” so that all skill levels would be able to participate. Youth thoroughly enjoyed being a part of beautifying their community and being able to **witness their voice displayed in such a public fashion**.



# 5 CONNECTING YOUTH TO SUPPORT SERVICES

To support connection of our youth to adolescent friendly supportive services, we initially worked with **Her Health First**, a grassroots, nonprofit CBO focused on **bridging the disparities between women of color and reproductive health**. It was planned that Her Health First would employ a Health Navigator who would support the TRUST Project by meeting with each cohort to serve as a trusted adult who they could turn to for resource connections. Initially, **the Health Navigator successfully connected a few youth with resources**, but pandemic restrictions made it difficult for the Health Navigator to connect into scheduled cohorts. Even if they were able to, they were only be able to attend a single session. Due to this, it became apparent that our youth did not feel comfortable connecting with the Health Navigator, as they were unable to develop a strong, trusting relationship with them. PRO realized that a Health Navigator was not going to be the best fit for our youth.

# of youth served by the counseling program:

66

# of hours of youth in counseling:

396

*85% of our participants reported that they felt **emotionally safe** while participating in the TRUST Program.*

*“It became apparent that youth weren’t always aware of what kind of health services they needed access to. Providing **individual services** allowed for **more referrals** to be made with youth and their families.”*  
**Terry Nojima, Associate Director**

As COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and youth began returning to in-person instruction, the mental health needs of youth were dire. To respond to these needs, **PRO piloted the integration of counseling services at a program school site**. PRO partnered with a licensed mental health clinician at the school **to connect interns working towards their degrees and/or licensures to TRUST Project participants in need of additional support**. The mental health clinicians and our program facilitators worked to create warm-handoffs to the interns to **foster much needed trusted connections**. The interns would provide **one-on-one counseling** and support connections to **additional resources** as needed. **This pilot was a success and provided much needed support to youth**, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19. PRO continues to explore opportunities for similar connections and continuity of services that provide **holistic support for youth**.

# REFLECTIONS



## ADAPTABILITY

Although the COVID-19 pandemic provided a myriad of obstacles, it taught us about the **resiliency of our organization, our partners, and our youth**. Our capacity to **innovate, adapt, and respond to the emerging needs and challenges of youth** was instrumental to the success of the TRUST Project. Our cross-sector, collaborative approach uniting systems-level entities and community organizations has **increased community-wide capacity to respond to and address our youths' rapidly evolving needs**.

## YOUTH VOICE

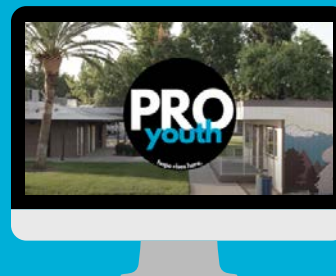
Amplifying youth voice was an **integral part of the success** of the TRUST Project for PRO, CBO partners, and youth participants. As we move forward, PRO remains **steadfast in its commitment to youth voice**, from formalized structures like Youth Advisory Boards, to engaging youth in participatory action research, and providing space for youth to provide feedback and voice **their concerns for their community and future**.



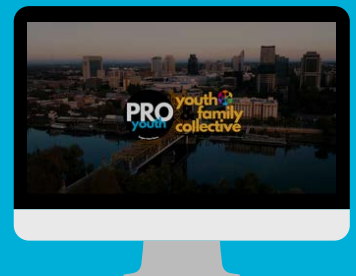
## COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Our collaborative program approach is **proving to be sustainable**. Since 2020, it has been used to partner with **70 organizations** to serve **more than 4,000 youth** (and counting!) to address critical issues including teen pregnancy/STI prevention, underage marijuana use prevention, work-based learning, and mental wellness. PRO's commitment to driving collaboration is maintained through its **Youth & Family Collective initiative**.

Check out videos from this project!



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