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# A DEEPER DIVE

How Leading SBYD  
Organizations Support SEL  
Growth in Youth of Color



**Laureus**  
SPORT FOR  
GOOD  
— USA —



#### MISSION & VISION

Laureus USA is a grant-making, non-profit organization that supports the growth and deepens the impact of programs that use sport as a tool for social change. We believe in the power of sport to change the world, as proclaimed by our founding patron Nelson Mandela at the 2000 Laureus World Sports Awards:



**“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand.**

**Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers.”**

We galvanize our diverse range of partners, including non-profits, athletes, teams, schools, and corporations, around a shared vision of sport as a force for positive change. By supporting programs on the ground and driving collaboration nationwide, we achieve our mission to improve the lives of youth and unite communities through the power of sport.

Since 2012, Laureus USA has impacted the lives of over one million youth by investing \$30 million in Sport-Based Youth Development (SBYD) organizations around the country that unleash the power of sport to enhance physical and mental health, improve educational and employment outcomes, and address critical social justice issues. Through our Sport for Good Cities membership, we have a network of over 200 organizations serving over 423,000 youth nationwide. As a leader in sports-based youth development, we advocate for the importance of quality youth sport programming and access to sport for all.

## Introduction

Laureus USA values academic research and program evaluation as tools for measuring, improving methodology, and sharing valuable insights and resources. We commission research and execute impact measurement to identify lessons learned, drive innovation, and improve the overall youth sport sector.

Our original study, “[Hitting a Home Run in Social Emotional Learning Outcomes](#),” published in partnership with Hello Insight, is a report that highlights the critical impact that sport is having on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) development for young people. Data from after school, non-sports programs was compared to that of sports programs and it was found that Sports-Based Youth Development (SBYD) organizations significantly outperformed their non-sports counterparts.

In the first study we also discovered that SBYD programs are especially well equipped in supporting young people of color.

In an effort to evaluate why there was such a positive impact on SEL growth, particularly in Black youth, Laureus USA and Hello Insight conducted a meeting of exemplar organizations from the first study, “[Hitting a Home Run in SEL Outcomes](#)” in order to identify what structures, methods, and strategies these organizations employed to elicit positive social skills, growth and contributions from youth they serve.

### WHAT IS SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

For the purpose of this report, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as “an integral part of education and human development.” SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.” (CASEL, n.d.).

SEL is a framework based on five core social and emotional competencies entrenched within interactive and interrelated environments to support engagement and learning. They are self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills.

### SBYD & SEL GROWTH

Intentional sport and athletics programming can be utilized as a platform to promote SEL through four ways (a) building emotional regulation, problem solving and decision making, empathy and communication skills; (b) promoting virtues of persistence, leadership, integrity, consideration for others and humility; (c) desire to give back; and (d) coaching capacity building (Elias, 2016). These four categories were reinforced through interactive group discussions with the organizational leaders who took place in this study.





## Purpose of Follow-Up & Research

The purpose of this research and the follow-up discussion is to understand how ten of the organizations examined in the first report were able to achieve exemplary SEL results for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx young people from under resourced communities.

Leaders from these ten (N = 10) organizations were selected to participate in a 90-minute research focus group. Employing a constant comparative content analysis method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the lead researcher Dr. Akilah R. Carter-Francique took the leaders through a set of questions and discussion topics. The leaders' responses were transcribed and then analyzed. Responses were reviewed to identify themes and categories that help explain leaders' experiences, beliefs, and sociocultural realities. These factors influence their organizational structures, programs and services, and therefore program participants' SEL development through sport.



Although it is understood that a data mining exercise followed by a research focus group with program leaders does not capture everything that allows their organizations to impact the lives of young people, five key findings came to the surface. In focusing on these five findings, the hope is to provide a general framework for other organizations that are looking to support the growth of young people in SEL capacities, especially programs that work closely with young people of color.

# Five Key Takeaways

The follow up study revealed that each of the ten organizations have comprehensive and culturally competent foundations that embrace reflexive and self-evaluative opportunities. Embracing those opportunities gave organizations the ability to adjust and foster supportive leadership and programming for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx youth rooted in SEL through the mode of sport.

Based on this group, these are the five key thematic findings for consideration when organizations are attempting to effectively enhance SEL competencies in youth through sport:

1. Organizational structures
2. Recruitment and hiring
3. Hiring of alumni
4. Education and self-assessment
5. Practitioners approaching with care (ethic of care)



## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The successful organizations had staff structures that consisted of personnel in positional categories of directors, administrators, media and marketing, development and fundraising, education, coaching, and volunteering. The range of personnel enabled the organizations to support participant engagement, offer intermittent touchpoints and wraparound services reflective of SEL competencies.



## RECRUITMENT & HIRING

Recruitment and hiring includes coaching capacity building through focused diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and the promotion of cultural competence.



## EDUCATION & SELF-ASSESSMENT

Organizations prioritized on-going education for staff consisting of internal on-boarding and organization skill specific teachings and external sociocultural and psychosocial trainings. Additionally, organizations noted that adding mental health and culturally based trauma supports increased participant engagement, thus promoting and bolstering organizational policies and practices.



## HIRING OF ALUMNI

Organizations made concerted efforts to hire program alumni noting the value of alumni experience on staff and alumni hires ability to support participant:

- Recruitment and retention
- Program engagement
- SEL programming



## PRACTITIONERS APPROACHING WITH CARE (ETHIC OF CARE)

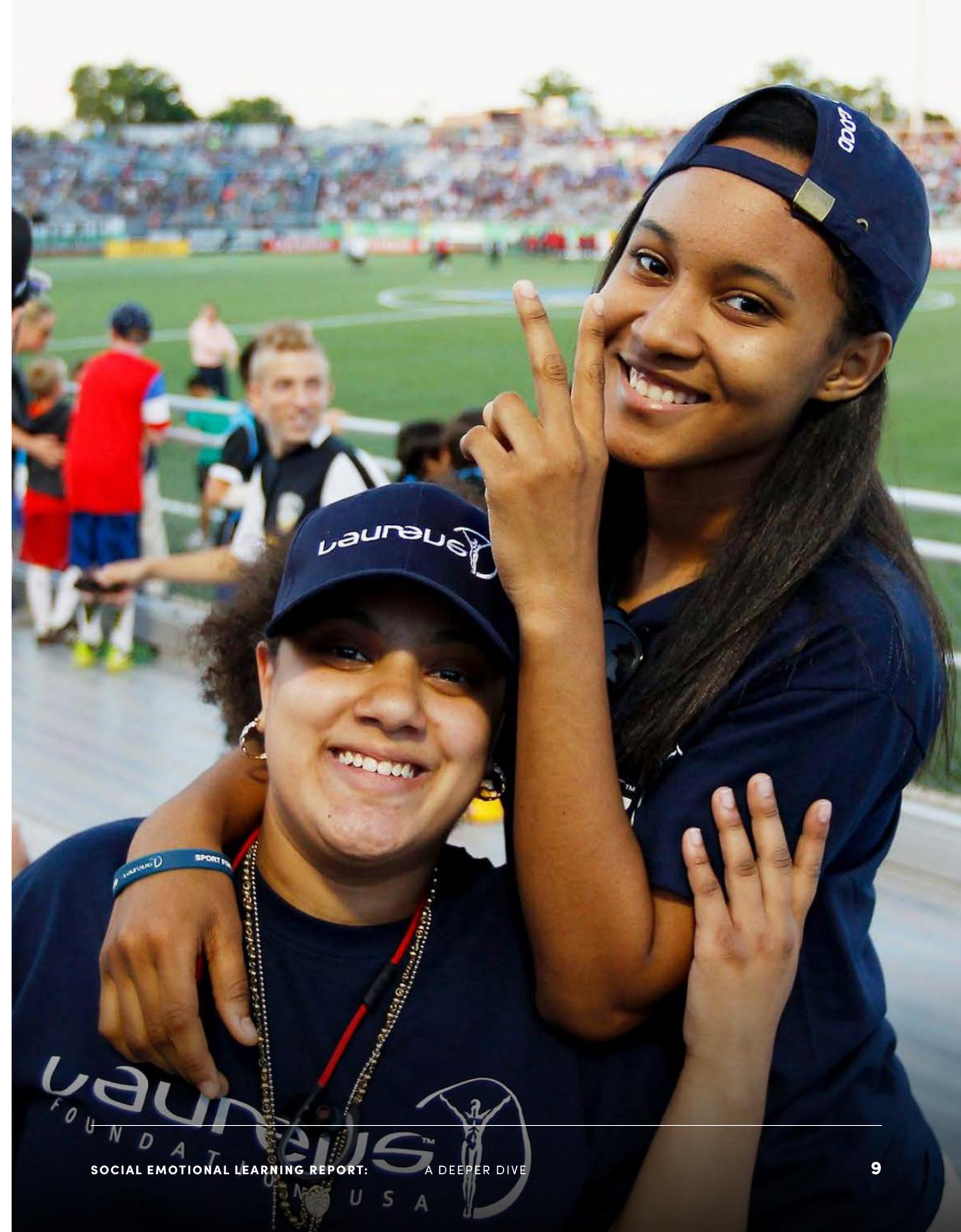
Organizations established a comprehensive developmental philosophy that informs organizational management practices and program participants' engagement experiences through an ethic of care.

## Organizational Structures

In discussion with the ten organizations, each revealed insight on their organizational structure and the benefit of having personnel that cover specific program needs and deliverables. The responses outline the importance of personnel that were either added or affirmed in their hires to support their respective organizational structures. Additionally, they noted how Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement influenced why the skills, characteristics, and recognition of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives were necessary in their approaches toward their organizational structure including hiring and programming.

Organizational personnel ranged from three to 20+ employees and consisted of personnel in positional categories to support specific organizational needs. The tiered level of employees at these organizations include:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Program Directors
- Media and Marketing Staff
- Development and Sponsorship Staff
- Educators and Coaches
- Volunteers and Interns





## Recruitment, Hiring, & Retaining

Employing a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practice, the organizational leaders' efforts to recruit, hire, educate and train allowed the necessary opportunities for employees to "learn and share ideas about how to build skills, virtues, and generosity in an athletic context" (Elias, 2016).

The ten organizational leaders noted their intentional DEI recruitment efforts that led to a pool of diverse and qualified applicants including: racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse applicants. Some also noted a focus on recruitment from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), recruitment from sport based listserves like TeamWork Online, non-profit organizations, granting foundations, non-sport organizations, and working with partner organizations like AmeriCorps and Up2Us Sports that support education and staffing efforts. When hiring, participant demographics and identity markers served as guides for the selection of employees so if and when hired they would be familiar with youth served by the respective organization:

**"We're looking at demographics. We're looking at income levels. We're looking at free and reduced lunch. We're looking at all those demographics to (reach) these tough places where a lot of people don't want to be."**

When it comes to retaining and engaging employees, organizational leaders emphasized that offering a fair and competitive wage/salary can serve as motivation for volunteers and employees to pursue SBYD as a viable career. However, there are existing challenges that preclude providing a competitive wage/salary to support all front-line employees (e.g., coaches) that do not serve in a full-time position. The barrier of funding, thus, becomes a barrier for retention of staff and can disrupt the quality and consistency of programs, services, and engagement with student participants (e.g., coaching turnover).



## Hiring Alumni

The organizational leaders expressed a great importance on the hiring of qualified program alumni to serve in a range of staff roles. The significance of alumni and the significance of prior knowledge and familiarity with program initiatives, format, and experiences was deemed highly valuable. In addition, representation and voice from alumni added value as the organizations worked to support student participants' sense of community and reaffirm SEL growth (e.g., contribution, positive identity, academic self-efficacy). The benefit of hiring alumni was conveyed through one organizational leader's description of an alumni staff member's value to student retention, parental engagement, and organizational programming and recruitment:

**“Her testimony yielded ‘the big hearts in the parents’ eyes . . . [because] they could envision that this young woman who talked about . . . taking the LSAT and studying for law school. They could envision that being their daughter. . . after that [her sharing of her experiences], parent involvement has increased dramatically. It’s really been an eye-opener for us having a former participant speak to the incoming participants’ parents. So, they [the parents] can see what their children will look like 10 years down the line.”**

Leaders gave mixed responses regarding use of ambassadors, interns, and/or volunteers. While the use of the ambassadors, interns, and volunteers was deemed valuable, the short-term nature of their tenure conflicted with the holistic development and self-defined nurturing spaces of their respective SBYD programs. While all expressed positive interactions, some organizational leaders identified that the presence of these staff members felt disruptive to the continuity and development of the youth participants because of the limited (six months to one year) terms and frequent turnover.



## Education & Self-Assessments

The ten organizations studied utilize a range of practices to engage their coaches and staff that fall into two categories: education and training and organizational self-assessments.

Education and training consisted of traditional internal on-boarding to familiarize employees with the organization, programs, and services. Then, organizations contracted external youth sport focused organizations that specialize in youth development training(s) and provide resources for administrators, coaches, participants, and parents either in-person and/or online (e.g. Positive Coaching Alliance, CHJS, Rise, Up2Us Sports).

Organizations noted the need to bolster the perception of SBYD and their respective organizational services within the philanthropic sector and youth sports sector. Hence, the notion of SEL comes to the front of the organizations' structuring and planning efforts to support healthy identity development, help manage emotions, assist with making informed decisions rooted in empathy, and identify and maintain healthy relationships (CASEL, n.d.). Based on SEL informed practices, the aforementioned concept of professionalizing SBYD through training and education is required.

The ten participating organizations also shared the value of self-assessments through examining their leadership practices and provided services. Through their self-assessments the organizations understood that mental health, wellness, and trauma were key areas to include in response to the two pandemics in the areas of health with Covid-19 and society with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) civil rights movement. The organizations noted there was great benefit in their staff (i.e., program directors, coaches, volunteers) learning about mental health and culturally based trauma experienced by youth they serve broadly, and by Black and Hispanic/Latinx youth specifically. Some of the organizations continued to dive deeper and center race, particularly during the BLM movement, and engaged in racial equity assessments to further understand and identify policies and practices that serve as barriers to access, treatment, and retention of participants and employees.

Ultimately, self-assessments (e.g., racial equity assessments and trauma informed organizational assessments), feedback, and recommendations influenced organizations' education and program development. These self-assessments also influenced how organizations disseminated the organizational policies and practices (e.g., Human Resources Handbook). This statement (in blue circle on page 15) suggests the benefits of said self-assessment(s):

“... a lot of the recommendations overlap which is really nice because now we have a huge list of things that we are working on as an organization and have different committees set up around them.”



## Practitioners Approaching with Care (Ethic of Care)

Organizational leaders' reflective analyses of programming, services, and participants encompasses a holistic identification of philosophy, management, and engagement. A key approach conveyed by organizational leaders was the importance of staff, coaches, and volunteers entering SBYD spaces with care and empathy. The notion of care, or ethic of care (Collins, 2000; Gilligan, 1982), is a concept that centers care and concern, responsibility, and relationship.

**"It's about, do you believe in the work that we do? And, do you care about building real relationships with the kids that we serve? And so... you can have a great curriculum, but without the staff that care, it [the organization programs] doesn't matter."**

The organizational leaders suggested that support services must be provided that aid in the development of participants for the longevity of their programs and the continued engagement of young people in sport. More specifically, providing social support (informational support, instrumental support, appraisal support, emotional support; House, 1981) is one practice that can aid in the holistic development and the SEL growth of participants. Providing social support serves many benefits including mental health and wellness and academic engagement for Black

and Hispanic/Latinx sport participants. (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Guntzviller, Williamson, & Rattcliff, 2020).

One organizational leader highlighted the social support benefits through the creation of a mentoring program for their participants, while other organization leaders identified social support benefits yielded through their awareness and willingness to address broader social challenges and experiences with participants. Accordingly, experiential best practice approaches for these organizations included providing education and training to facilitate social support for participants with pandemic navigation (i.e., access to food services; instrumental support), virtual learning assistance (instrumental support), and identifying resources and adopting coping strategies for participants and their families to aid undocumented family members (informational support, instrumental support, emotional support).

Therefore care, empathy, and consistency are key components of engagement between staff & coaches and participants and their families. In addition, due to the host of individual and societal challenges it is imperative to center social interaction and having fun as voiced in the following sentiment (in pink circle on next page):



**"I think just trying to have fun with the kids and making the social aspect of it... just try and really ensure we're providing a good experience for the kids and for the coaches."**



## Conclusion

This study revealed that the organizations who were able to achieve exemplary SEL results started with a comprehensive and culturally competent foundation that embraced reflexive and self-evaluative opportunities. Supported by that foundation, the organizations demonstrated an ability to adjust and comply to support the development of SEL through sport for Black and Hispanic/Latinx youth participants.

This examination and report of the ten organizations revealed keen insight on the value of SEL in SBYD. Efforts to learn more about and from these and similar organizations can provide information to aid other youth sport programs, parents/guardians, student participants, volunteers, and individuals seeking to pursue careers in SBYD.



In addition, efforts to obtain on-going information and data on social emotional learning through SBYD will aid stakeholders. For example, information and data collection done by Laureus USA will identify ways to continue to best support communities, SBYD organizations, and their organizational leaders. Hence, there is a need to engage in on-going research and data collection that includes but is not limited to quantitative and qualitative data about participant demographics (race, gender, social class, age), participant, parent and staff experiences, and emerging practices and best practices. A larger database would aid overall learning for the youth sport sector and help monitor the challenges that affect SBYD programs inclusive of cultural challenges for youth and leaders.

## References & Definitions

### PYD

Positive youth development (PYD) is an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youth's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. (The Federal Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, n.d.)

### Weblink:

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>

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## A big thank you to the 10 organizations who participated in this study:

BEAT THE STREETS - NYC

<https://www.btsny.org/>

GIRLS IN THE GAME

<https://www.girlsinthegame.org/>

I-TRI

<https://itrigirls.org/>

L.E.A.D CENTER FOR YOUTH

<https://leadcenterforyouth.org/>

LOS ANGELES DODGERS FOUNDATION

<https://www.mlb.com/dodgers/community/foundation>

METRO SQUASH

<https://metrosquash.org/>

NEW HEIGHTS NYC

<https://www.newheightsnyc.org/>

PLAY RUGBY USA

<https://playrugbyusa.org/>

STARFINDER FOUNDATION

<https://starfinderfoundation.org/>

WASHINGTON NATIONALS PHILANTHROPIES

<https://www.nats4good.org/youth-baseball-academy/>

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE RESEARCHER

**Dr. Akilah R. Carter-Francique (Ph.D., University of Georgia) is the CEO, co-founder, and educator with Francique Sport and Education Consulting, LLC.**



She also serves as the Dean for the School of Education, Health, and Human Services at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, USA. With 20 years of experience in higher education, an extensive research background and a strong vision for leadership in the field of education, Carter-Francique served sporting spaces that centered experiences of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Hence, her scholarly endeavors and field of focus encompasses the intersection of sport, society, and social justice that is inclusive of issues of diversity, social movements, and the dynamics of social change and development.

Carter-Francique served as the 2018–2019 President of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), and served as a member of Laureus “Sport for Good” Research Council in the U.S.



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