



# The Impact of a Lack of Diversity in Leadership Positions on Self-Perceptions and Views of Success in Latino/a/x Youth

Jordan Thomas<sup>1,2</sup>, Janie Zeh<sup>1,2</sup>, Niki Messmore<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, IN; <sup>2</sup>Boys and Girls Club of Tippecanoe County, IN



(Image captured at BGC of Tippecanoe County 10th Street location)

## Background Information:

The Boys and Girls Club (BGC) of Tippecanoe County is a national nonprofit organization that cares for youths ages 6-18 from a very diverse set of backgrounds and experiences. The youth that attend this out-of-school time (OST) program are a very diverse group that participate in many physical and educational activities each day. Youth members can also receive a morning and afternoon snack that helps give them a nutritional boost before participating in their organized activities with staff members and volunteers.

In collaboration with leadership at the club, we identified that one of the club's existing data gaps was that the BGC of Tippecanoe County did not track demographics of its active employees, which made it difficult for them to consciously work towards maintaining the level of diversity that is expected within top-tier organizations in today's society. At a national level, BGC states that a commitment to inclusion is one of its top values on its national website<sup>1</sup>. This research explores BGC of Tippecanoe County's ability to adhere to this value in terms of the leaders and role models that its youth population are surrounded by. It also details the psychological effects that can result specifically in the Latino/a/x youth population when they do not see themselves represented in positions of leadership and success.

## Materials & Methods

A 2-part anonymous survey was developed and distributed to all active staff and volunteers that work at either of the two locations for BGC of Tippecanoe County. Part 1 consisted of 9 demographics questions that asked basic questions about the age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and educational backgrounds of participants, as well as their prior experience with trauma-informed care and working with youth who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Part 2 of the survey had participants answer questions about their own potential ACEs and the data was then used to calculate an ACEs score. This ACEs score data was used in a separate research project titled "Understanding the Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on Children at the Boys and Girls Club of Tippecanoe County, Indiana," where caregivers were also asked to fill out ACEs surveys for their children. This current study had 18 total survey responses returned to researchers for data analysis.

## Results

After analysis of the 18 total surveys from the staff/volunteers of BGC of Tippecanoe County, it was found that 89% of employees identified as "White/European". In addition, 100% of responses labeled "English" as their primary language. Data revealed that 94% of respondents listed their sexual orientation as "heterosexual". 100% of the participants selected either "male" or "female" as their gender identity, showing no divergence from the "male/female" binary at the club. In the final 2 demographics questions from the survey, 56% of the respondents indicated that their childhood household had an income greater than \$50,000 and another 56% stated that they had an education level at or below a high school diploma. Figure 1 outlines the top 5 results from this study that relate to Latino/a/x youth identity and self-perception.

Pre-existing data on youth demographics was provided by the BGC of Tippecanoe County and used for comparison. The data included all participants who attended at least once between 1/16/2022 and 6/8/2022. The ethnicities for youth were recorded in the following categories (exact terms copied from BGC of Tippecanoe County report), with percentages listed following each: Caucasian (34%), African-American (33%), Hispanic (12%), Multi-Racial (20%), and Other (1%).

## Discussion

The results collected from the staff/volunteer surveys showed that there are several crucial diversity gaps that exist at the Boys and Girls Club of Tippecanoe County. They also highlight what can result from a simple gap in data collection and a low level of Latino/a/x community engagement. Studies have shown that many well-known OST programs "tend to reflect White, middle-class norms"<sup>2</sup> which may be the case with BGC of Tippecanoe County. Based on the data, the predominant ethnic background and childhood household income of staff and volunteers is White/European and >\$50,000, respectively. The racial composition of the employees at the club does not align with what research shows is the best way to effectively reach youth and keep them in programs. Having staff from similar neighborhood and racial backgrounds as the children has been shown to be an effective way to increase engagement and longevity for children in the programs<sup>3</sup>. One positive way that the club has already worked towards this is through a "Junior Leaders" program. This program helps some of the older kids work their way into leadership roles and eventually paid staff positions at the club if they continue to mature.

One of the most shocking findings in the results is the comparison of the demographics between staff/volunteers and the youth that they serve. White/European being 89% in staff and only 34% in the youth shows that there is much room for improvement so that the youth can feel represented by the staff that serve them. In a 2017 literature review, it was found that bilingual and bicultural personnel rank as one of the best practices for engagement of the Latino/a/x community<sup>4</sup>. While BGC of Tippecanoe County does not currently have this, it should be something they strive for moving forward. As it has been shown in other school-based programs, it is crucial for youth to have a place to explore their social-emotional and ethnic identities<sup>5</sup>. Having a diverse group of staff/volunteer leaders makes facilitation of this self-exploration much more effective because they too have had to go through this process on their own and can share their experiences with the children.

## Conclusions

The literature review illustrated that a lack of diversity in leadership positions can have a negative impact on Latino/a/x youth who participate in OST programs. BGC of Tippecanoe County's current staff/volunteer list does not put Latino/a/x youth in the best possible developmental environment for cultural appreciation and self-confidence. Recommendations for the organization are as follows:

1. Hire more diverse staff/volunteer members who better represent the children that attend the club.
2. Design a Spanish version of the membership form.
3. Advertise the BGC at the Tippecanoe County Latino Festival
4. Establish a partnership with the Latino Center for Wellness and Education (LCWE) to have cultural appreciation days and take part in their Holiday Party for the community where kids receive free toys.
5. Allow employees to have more realistic dress code expectations such as: facial hair, different hair color for perceived males, earrings on perceived males, and tattoos. Self-expression is an important part of Latino/a/x culture as well as other cultures too.

Following these recommendations should make for a more inclusive environment for Latino/a/x youth, as well as a more culturally competent experience for everyone at the club.

## Acknowledgements

This project was funded by AmeriCorps through the Hoosier Public Health Corps Program and supported by Boys and Girls Club of Tippecanoe County.



AmeriCorps



LYN TREECE  
BOYS & GIRLS CLUB  
OF TIPPECANOE COUNTY

## References

1. *Our mission & story*. Boys & Girls Clubs of America . (n.d.). Retrieved July 18, 2022, from <https://www.bgca.org/about-us/our-mission-story>
2. Erbstein, N., & Fabionar, J. O. (2019). Supporting Latinx youth participation in out-of-school time programs. *Afterschool Matters*, 29, 17-27
3. Williams, J. L., & Deutsch, N. L. (2016). Beyond between-group differences: Considering race, ethnicity, and culture in research on positive youth development programs. *Applied Developmental Science*, 20(3), 203-213.
4. Vega, L., Brody, B., & Cummins, M. (2016). Best practices for outreach and engagement to Latino audiences using community-based programs. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 4(2), 148-166
5. Rivas-Drake, D., Lozada, F. T., Pinetta, B. J., & Jagers, R. J. (2020). School-based social-emotional learning and ethnic-racial identity among African American and Latino adolescents. *Youth & Society*, 52(7), 1331-1354. doi:10.1177/0044118X20939736

