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To	OFCY Staff
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Subject	OFCY Programs' Shift in Response to COVID-19

Introduction

This memo highlights how Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY) grantees have shifted in response to COVID-19 and shelter-in-place. This memo draws on data gathered from a cross-section of grantees funded in 2019-2020 that are inclusive of each OFCY funding strategy, (See Attachment A for list of programs selected). It is informed by interviews with Program Directors, representing 25 OFCY-funded programs, all conducted by Zoom or phone from April 14-May 15, 2020. These interviews explored the following overarching questions as they relate to COVID-19:

- How have OFCY programs and activities provided shifted in response to COVID-19 and shelter-in-place?
- How have OFCY programs supported/engaged participants in this current context?
- How can OFCY continue to support programs in the midst of COVID-19 and shelter-in-place?

In each section below, we highlight themes that emerged across these interviews, moving from those that were most mentioned to those that were least commonly mentioned. We conclude by sharing recommendations offered on how OFCY can continue to support funded organizations during this crisis.

OFCY Programs' Shifts in Response to COVID-19

As the Bay Area began to shelter-in-place on March 17, 2020, OFCY programs rapidly began to strategize about how to shift their program and service offerings for their youth and family participants. Programs expressed commitments to retain staff members during this uncertain period, investing in technological infrastructure to support staff transition to virtual programming, and increasing communications with partners to coordinate how best to support youth and families. As they reflected on these shifts, the following themes emerged across all respondents:

- **Connecting youth and families with crisis support.** The shelter-in-place order to prevent community spread across Oakland and the Bay Area created an immediate crisis for Oakland families and youth. There was a rapid transition to working remotely and an increased need for assistance accessing unemployment assistance, food, and other community resources,

particularly among low-income families in Oakland. As a result, due to their direct connection to Oakland youth and families, OFCY programs most commonly cited shifting their services and programs to provide crisis support. In general, this took shape in the following ways:

- *Supporting families with accessing food.* Food insecurity became one of the most cited challenges experienced by Oakland communities. At least seven OFCY programs connected families to community food banks and OUSD's food distribution sites and/or distributed food to families. One program gathered fruits and vegetables through their partnership at Castlemont High School's school garden for participants in East Oakland. Another program also paid staff to volunteer at local food banks.
 - *Increased case management support.* Three programs (at least two of which were Family Resource Centers) directly mentioned increasing case management and conducting needs assessments with their participants to identify key needs and to provide support for a wide variety of services, including applying for unemployment and other safety net services, sharing information on mental health support and other community resources, and support with filing taxes to ensure receipt of federal stimulus money.
 - *Raising private donations to provide direct funding assistance to families impacted by loss of jobs.* At least two programs mentioned increased efforts on fundraising and private donations to distribute funds to students and families needing financial support.
- **Providing programming virtually, using Zoom or other online platforms.** OFCY programs also had to rapidly shift from in-person programming to using platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet to engage with parents/caregivers and youth. Recognizing that Oakland families and youth face a stark digital divide, interviewees mentioned having to quickly conduct assessments on access to phones, laptops, and internet. Three programs mentioned investing in technological infrastructure for staff, while at least five programs noted creating a process to check in with each participant in their program to assess their ability to connect to virtual programming. Programs that directly work with parents/caregivers and/or families mentioned holding one-on-one conversations to ensure that they could be set up to join in on Zoom or other virtual platforms. Often, these programs also served as a conduit to support Oakland families that lacked access with local community resources for both laptops and access to internet.
 - **Developing, updating, and creating new curriculum and content for virtual settings.** Once shelter-in-place was announced, OFCY programs focused on modifying program curriculum to be delivered in virtual settings. One program in the Parent Engagement and Support strategy that uses a validated, in-person parenting curriculum for parents/caregivers, held conversations with curriculum creators to find effective approaches for engaging participants virtually while maintaining program fidelity. Programs supporting students in afterschool settings partnered with schools to identify the best times to offer enrichment services. Programs in the Career Awareness and Employment Support strategy also shifted their program curriculum to be held

*All of a sudden, we have a lot of families who are in crisis. We had to shift our services and our support to offer crisis support to all the families who have applied, or who have been referred to us. A lot of our families may not even qualify for the supports that are out there.—
OIHS's Refugee & Immigrant Wellness, Leadership and Restorative Justice Initiative*

virtually; staff have emailed materials or developed mobile-friendly curriculum to support participants in completing their program requirements (e.g. employment workshops, case management, and career exploration). Notably, one program that supports youth in health career awareness and employment support had to cancel in-hospital rotations of their internship program due to COVID-19.

- **Increased academic and enrichment support for Oakland students as part of transition to virtual learning.** As OUSD transitioned to virtual learning at the end of March, OFCY programs also concurrently focused on shifting their program models to best support students. Programs that work with elementary, middle, and high-school aged students, used this period of transition to provide professional development and training opportunities for staff while also focusing on planning for engaging students, supporting with literacy and math development, and aligning to school plans on virtual learning.
- **Sharing information and resources related to COVID-19.** OFCY programs, primarily those that are in the Parent Engagement and Support and Family Resource Center strategies also focused on supporting parents/caregivers with information on safety guidelines regarding COVID-19. One Family Resource Center virtually engaged parents/caregivers and young children in learning about COVID-19, using creative songs to explain social distance, handwashing, and how to be safe and healthy to both parents and children. One program in the Parent Support and provided materials for making masks to parents/caregivers and, via Zoom, showed parents/caregivers how to make masks for their families. One other program developed YouTube videos to share information about COVID-19. At least two programs mentioned providing families with information on where to access COVID-19 tests and secure cleaning and disinfectant supplies.

OFCY Programs' Engagement of Youth and Families

OFCY programs' shift toward more virtual and online platforms required significant changes in how they engage with the youth and families in their programs. A major theme that emerged was the importance of OFCY programs providing consistent programming for youth and families, particularly when navigating uncertainty, fear, and anxiety around COVID-19 and shelter-in-place. As interviewees reflected on how they worked with youth and families, the following strategies emerged:

- **Developing creative activities to engage youth and children.** Across all interviewees, shifting to virtual programming was a daunting effort, but also allowed for program staff to innovate by developing creative strategies and fun activities to engage youth and parents with young children. Interviewees, particularly those in the Youth Development and Leadership strategy, shared that engaging with youth participants virtually is challenging, due to "Zoom fatigue" or lack of access to laptops and phones, so their effort centered on developing program curriculum and content that

We started to quickly see that everyone shifted to Zoom. Zoom is the way to go, right? However, we also knew that not everyone has access to internet, but most young people have a phone. We know that they are active on social media, they are on YouTube, on Instagram. We started asking ourselves: How do we get videos on there? How do we go on Instagram to do videos and keep them engaged?
—YR Media Digital Media Pathways

could be fun and engaging. These included: hosting virtual music clubs and books clubs, replicating outdoor camp models and field trips virtually, promoting physical and social wellbeing by holding virtual push-up challenges or sharing motivational videos, engaging young children alongside parents in singing songs and other activities to promote motor skill development.

- **Delivering activity packets to youth and families.** To support enrichment activities at home, programs also compiled materials that would accompany online activities. These packets included materials to support academic and enrichment, such as books, math worksheets, crossword puzzles, crayons, and paper. One afterschool, arts-based program delivered approximately 500 art kits to youth.
- **Holding support sessions to promote wellbeing.** OFCY programs, both those that serve parents/caregivers and those that serve youth, led conversations about how families and youth have been feeling throughout shelter-in-place, providing a space for them to share their feelings, which ranged from anxiety, fear, and uncertainty, to boredom. To support participants during this time, at least nine programs mentioned having staff become “wellness ambassadors” who conducted weekly “wellness check-ins” with participants, either individually or in small groups. One program organized healing circles that incorporated restorative justice principles while another shared YouTube videos to lead youth in meditation, mindfulness, and reflection during this time. Another program conducted telehealth consultations with families. These wellness checks and increased outreach efforts were designed to prevent isolation, encourage youth and families to share their feelings and identify needs, and to promote positive mental health.
- **Taking a whole family approach to connect with participants.** Youth-serving programs, both in school and in the community, shared the importance of taking a whole family approach to identify needs, increase engagement and retention, and to share information and resources during this time. At least six programs noted strategies to connect with parents/caregivers by phone and virtually. One program noted that parents/caregivers needed support with keeping children engaged and active at home and requested resources and support. To increase engagement and retention in program activities, another program promoted “parent challenges,” which were used to promote communication and check-ins. Parents that were most actively communicating would be entered into a raffle at the end of the week. Another program hosted office hours and held parent meetings by Zoom to share information and resources.

“We became more responsive to students and their family’s needs. We did not have experience with supporting families with safety net benefits, but now we are connecting families with these supports. I feel that we are now doing a lot more and connecting more with families. The fact that they can call us at any time, at any point, is great.” —Lincoln’s West Oakland Initiative`

Recommendations for OFCY

Programs shared a deep appreciation for OFCY staff and support during these last three months. The majority of interviewees shared feeling grateful for OFCY’s flexibility around reporting and program shifts

as they focused on serving Oakland's youth and families during shelter-in-place. To support programs, the following recommendations surfaced from interviews.

- **Sharing resources to promote distance learning and staff development.**

The transition to providing programs and services in a virtual setting amidst a health crisis proved difficult. To be effective, programs shared that OFCY could support in providing access to resources for developing innovative program strategies and effective virtual learning curriculum. Moreover, programs are also hoping to learn approaches for managing organizations and staff virtually. One program also mentioned that OFCY could create spaces for programs to come together to learn from each other.

“Right now, a lot of organizations are not working as collaboratively as we normally would. It would be helpful to learn from OFCY what other programs are doing and strategies and tips that they may have. It would be helpful if OFCY could create a space or share out what folks are finding is working or not working during this time.” —Girls’ Inc. of Alameda County`

- **Adapting and communicating expectations.**

Several programs shared that navigating shelter-in-place and COVID-19 has placed substantial uncertainty and strain on program staff. Programs appreciated flexibility from OFCY grant managers to be able to shift their programs and identify how best to report on units of service data. They hope that OFCY staff can continue to communicate flexibility while programs work to serve Oakland youth and families.

- **Continuing communication about OFCY programming and funding.**

Finally, in recognition that COVID-19 and shelter-in-place may have significant impact on local government funding, programs shared that they are navigating through a lot of uncertainty with what the funding landscape will look like for the remainder of the year. As a result, programs suggested that OFCY could share as much information as possible, such as any anticipated funding changes.