



**African Communities
Public Health Coalition**

Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project REPORT

SUBMITTED BY: SENAIT ADMASSU, PROJECT MANAGER

June 27, 2025



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH**
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Project Report

Organization Name: African Communities Public Health Coalition

Project Title: Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project (March 1st, 2024 --- June 30th 2025)

The African Communities Public Health Coalition implemented the **Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project**, funded by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. This initiative was designed to recruit and engage a minimum of 15 Black youth and young adults, ages 16–25, to raise awareness about the impact of Fentanyl- drug use on mental health and overall wellness within the Black community in Service Area 1 (Antelope Valley) of Los Angeles County.

Through this project, participants received training in **empowerment, awareness, and prevention strategies**, as well as in **outreach, peer education, and public speaking**. These training sessions prepared the cohort to become leaders and advocates within their community, empowering them to educate their peers about the connections between substance use and mental health, and to lead **cohort-led drug awareness presentations**.

In turn, these trained participants engaged and recruited an additional **100 Black youth and young adults**, including middle school students, to take part in the presentations and interactive learning sessions. The project culminated in a **community celebration event**, which brought together participants, families, and stakeholders to showcase the learning outcomes and highlight the participants' accomplishments. This event served both as a platform to acknowledge their efforts and as an opportunity to deepen awareness and connections within the Black community. The recruitment and training activities were conducted in accessible locations within Service Area 1 (Antelope Valley), focusing on areas with significant African and African American youth populations. Venues included **local community centers, churches, and other trusted spaces** that were easily reachable by public transportation, ensuring broad participation and inclusivity.

1) Number and Types of Efforts to Recruit and Engage the Community

The **Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project** conducted extensive recruitment and community engagement activities between **March 20, 2024, and July 30, 2024**. These efforts were led by the **African Communities Public Health Coalition** (African Coalition) in collaboration as a contracted consultant.

Recruitment was promoted through a range of methods and platforms, including:

- Distributing and presenting project flyers at **local community resource centers, faith-based organizations** (churches, mosques, and other places of worship), and **community gathering spaces** such as restaurants and centers.
- Sending announcements and promotional materials via **email** to the African Coalition's database.

- Leveraging **digital platforms**, including social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram), and text message campaigns to reach a wider audience.
 - Hosting in-person and virtual meetings with representatives from institutions serving African and African American youth, including **high schools, colleges, Boys & Girls Clubs**, and the **YMCA**.
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2) Number of Youth Reached Through Recruitment and Engagement Activities

Throughout the recruitment and engagement period, the project successfully connected with **over 150 youth across Los Angeles County**, providing information about the program and its objectives. As a result of these efforts:

- **35 youth participated in the project orientation**, gaining an understanding of its scope and expectations.
 - **20 youth were fully recruited and signed on to participate** in the project.
 - **9 youth completed the full training program**, gaining valuable knowledge and skills related to drug prevention, mental health, and peer education.
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3) General Demographic Information of Participant Youth

The participants were comprised of **male and female Black and African-descent youth** from diverse age groups. The majority came from African American communities located in the **Antelope Valley**, including **Lancaster and Palmdale**, as well as surrounding areas. The participant pool also included youth from other African-descent communities, such as individuals with heritage from **Ghana, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Jamaica**.

4) Recruitment Challenges and Mitigations

To reach the **Statement of Work (SOW)** target numbers, the recruitment period was **extended until October 2024**, allowing for additional time and greater outreach efforts. The team conducted both in-person and virtual meetings with local organizations, educational institutions, and community stakeholders.

Initially, by **May 30, 2024**, over 30 youth had been recruited and signed up for the program. Consent forms were signed by both participants and their caregivers, and orientations were conducted soon after consent was received. However, following the end of the school year in May 2024, many youth and caregiver contacts became unresponsive, presenting a challenge in sustaining engagement.

To overcome this barrier, the project implemented new strategies, such as providing a **\$25 gift certificate incentive** for attending the orientation. This approach yielded positive results, and by the end of the extended recruitment period (July 30, 2024), an additional five African American youth had been successfully engaged.

Training African Immigrant Youth and Young Adults as Community Ambassadors

In addition to the core curriculum focusing on fentanyl use and its impact on youth, the training program also addressed topics such as general substance abuse, mental health service gaps, discrimination, and the language and cultural barriers that affect African immigrant youth and young adults. Upon successfully completing the training, participants received a gift certificate as a token of recognition.

The project began with an orientation and presentation that introduced participants to its overall purpose, expectations, and available opportunities. The role of a Community Ambassador was explained, highlighting the benefits and responsibilities associated with the role. Both the orientation and training sessions were supplemented with meals and beverages to create a welcoming and supportive environment. An incentive of \$200 was announced for participants, with an initial 25% disbursement upon completing the curriculum-based training.

Project Training Period

August 1, 2024 – October 27, 2024

The project aimed to recruit and train African American and Black youth and young adults as ambassadors within the Antelope Valley area. Due to challenges in reaching the desired number of participants, the African Coalition requested an extension of the project's deliverance timeframe. From March through September 2024, efforts were intensified to engage the target audience and adapt strategies for recruitment.

During this period, curriculum and survey materials were finalized, promotional materials were updated, and greater emphasis was placed on utilizing social media platforms and hosting in-person and virtual meetings with organizations serving the youth. These efforts resulted in the successful recruitment of an additional participants.

Make-Up Training Session

December, 2024

A make-up training session was conducted virtually for participants who missed any of the initial training sessions. This included one person who missed the first session and three participants who missed the second. All training sessions were conducted in an active and engaging manner, ensuring strong participation and attention.

Six participants, who had partially completed the initial training, were also brought to full completion. Upon finishing their training, participants received a stipend of up to \$50. To further encourage active participation, \$25 incentives were extended to all participants attending the make-up training, allowing the project to secure additional youth participation.

Creating a Supportive Environment for Youth

October – December 2024

In line with the revised project timeline, activities continued from October through December 2024. The project secured various facilities and venues across the Antelope Valley area and conducted both in-person and virtual sessions ranging from one to two hours.

The training and presentations were introduced to a wide range of organizations and platforms, including:

- Antelope Valley Americas Job Center
- Penny Lane Centers and Change Lane Programs
- Youth With A Purpose
- Antelope Valley Children's Center (AVCC)
- LA Care Health
- Antelope Valley Chambers of Commerce
- SALVA, CRC Palmdale, Family Promise SCV
- Antelope Valley African American Chamber of Commerce
- CCRC4Kids, Antelope Valley Press News
- Antelope Valley Community Group, LA County Youth Services
- QH Chamber, Lancaster School District, Resources for Everyone
- Victory Outreach Palmdale, LASDMET, East Side Union School District
- Antelope Valley College, The Boulevard Lancaster
- AVCPALMDA, AV Girls Run, Antelope Valley Violence Prevention Coalition, Antelope Valley Wellbeing Coalition

Trained youth served as peer facilitators, presenting the curriculum to their peers and other youth attending these sessions. Multiple \$25 gift certificates were also used as incentives for participants attending these sessions, creating an encouraging and rewarding experience for all involved.

What Change Do We Want in Our Community?

The **Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project** aims to create significant and lasting changes within the Antelope Valley (Service Area 1) by addressing the rising challenge of fentanyl use and mental health struggles among Black and African heritage youth and their families. The project has evolved to incorporate new strategies, approaches, and platforms to better connect with its target audience and build trust within underserved communities.

Project Evolution and Strategic Changes

Initially, the project relied on traditional methods to attract participants, such as tabling at events and sharing information through word of mouth. As we progressed, it became evident that our approach required adaptation. To better engage Black and African heritage youth, especially younger generations, we implemented the following changes:

- **Utilized Social Media and Paid Advertising:** Created dedicated Facebook and Instagram pages and invested in paid social media advertisements to broaden outreach.
- **Created Engaging Activities:** Developed interactive spaces such as spoken word nights, escape room events, and tabling opportunities. These activities were intentionally designed to pique interest and foster connections within the target audience.

Project Presentation and Recruitment Continued

From **January 2025 to June 17, 2025**, the project focused intensively on presenting its objectives, recruiting participants, and assessing their needs:

- **Information Sessions:** Engaged participants through presentations that introduced the project's mission and opportunities available for training and empowerment as community ambassadors.
- **Pre- and Post-Questionnaires:** Developed questionnaires based on the training curriculum and administered them to participants before and after their training experience. These questionnaires allowed the project to assess participant understanding, measure the effectiveness of the training, and adapt as needed.
(Please refer to attached questionnaires and analysis for further details.)

Achievements and Challenges

The project's **immediate aims** were to recruit and train Black and African heritage youth (including new arrivals) to:

- Understand and address the growing threat of fentanyl use.
- Develop awareness and resilience related to mental health and trauma.

The **long-term aims** of the initiative were to:

- Empower African American, African, and Caribbean immigrant youth and their families in Antelope Valley.
- Enable underserved and marginalized communities to access substance abuse and mental health services.
- Encourage participants to educate and advocate within their communities.

While the recruitment process was strong at the project's launch, it became challenging during the summer of 2024 due to:

- The end of the school year.
- Disconnection from some high school students during the holidays.
- Changes in staffing and project leadership.

In response, the project adjusted by:

- Hiring a new Project Coordinator and Social Media Organizer.
- Empowering and recruiting Black and African Heritage youth from LA cities .
- Expanding its presence at churches, community workshops, and other local gatherings.
- Maintaining a focus on culturally relevant and accessible programming.

Final Event and Community Celebration

To build on the project's momentum, the initiative will host a **Grand Finale Celebration** on **June 27, 2025**. This grassroots event will:

- Be led by the trained youth cohort.

- Engage approximately 300 additional youth and adults from Black, African American, and Caribbean communities.
- Provide a space for learning, sharing, and exploring diverse community perspectives on substance abuse and mental health.
- Incorporate communal meals and cultural expressions, fostering connections across heritage lines.

Final Observations

Throughout the implementation of this project, one critical takeaway became evident: **there is an urgent and pressing need for culturally tailored training, education, and empowerment for Black youth, as well as a significant gap in services available to Black, African American, and Caribbean communities across Los Angeles County.**

Through conversations, questionnaires, and participant feedback, we learned that many of the youth engaged in the project had recently moved from South Los Angeles neighborhoods and were grappling with the challenges of integrating into new communities. In many instances, these young people felt like outsiders and found themselves exposed to environments where belonging came at a cost — often in the form of peer pressure to participate in negative practices such as smoking marijuana, using fentanyl, and experimenting with other drugs.

Although maintaining long-term engagement with some participants was challenging due to these complex dynamics, it became increasingly evident that **these communities desperately need strong, prevention-based education and support programs** — programs that can foster a sense of belonging, resilience, and belonging rooted in health, culture, and empowerment.

The project's approach — combining traditional engagement methods with digital platforms, interactive events, and culturally relevant education — has laid a strong foundation for addressing these needs. This approach not only promotes ongoing empowerment and resilience but also encourages a shift in community norms towards health, belonging, and belonging rooted in heritage and strength.

Learned Experiences and Challenges

Throughout the implementation of the project, we observed that participating youth often demonstrated high energy and enthusiasm during the initial recruitment activities. However, this interest tended to diminish over time, making it challenging to maintain consistent engagement in meetings, training sessions, and other commitments.

In addition, it became apparent that the level of interaction between the Antelope Valley (AV) organizations, city offices, and the project team was comparatively lower than that of their counterparts in the Los Angeles area. This limited collaboration impacted overall project momentum and posed additional coordination hurdles.

The project also faced delays due to slower responses from certain communities and partner organizations when it came to recruitment efforts. The geographic distance and commute between Los Angeles and AV further compounded these challenges, making it difficult to adhere to the original project timeline and deliverance schedule.

As a result, the project team was required to adapt by developing new strategies and ideas to meet the initiative's objectives. Securing venues became an ongoing challenge, and maintaining consistent event times and dates required constant adjustment and negotiation. Despite these setbacks, these learned experiences have been invaluable in shaping a more flexible, resilient approach for future implementations.

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Service Area I (Antelope Valley)
Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project
Community Celebration Event REPORT

SUBMITTED BY: SENAIT ADMASSU, PROJECT MANAGER

July 17, 2025

Black Youth & Young Adults Drug Prevention Project

Community Celebration Event Report

Event Title: Family Fun Day – Service Area I Black Youth & Young Adults Drug Prevention Project

Event Date: June 27, 2025

Time: 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Location: Sgt. Steve Owen Memorial Park, Lancaster, CA

Event Summary:

In alignment with the “Service Area I Black Youth and Young Adults Drug Prevention Project” Scope of Work (SOW) under the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH), the African Communities Public Health Coalition (ACPHC) hosted a vibrant and engaging Community Celebration event. The event focused on family fun, empowerment, and education, aiming to strengthen community connections while addressing critical substance use issues.

The event held outdoors at Sgt. Steve Owen Memorial Park in Lancaster, this event welcomed over 300 attendees, including families from neighboring cities across the Antelope Valley. The primary goal was to raise awareness among both youth and caregivers about the growing challenges of substance abuse, with a particular focus on the rising threat of fentanyl use in the region. Throughout the day, educational materials were provided, and attendees were encouraged to participate in an event survey. The survey gathered valuable feedback on service gaps and community needs. Most responses highlighted a strong desire for more community-based, culturally responsive events that are inclusive and promote positive social impact. A standout moment of the event was the youth-led spoken word performance, delivered by Youth Ambassadors in multiple languages. Their powerful message centered on the real-life struggles youth face when dealing with mental health challenges, substance use, overdose, and suicide. The performance also spotlighted the disproportionate impact of substance abuse on Black and Brown youth, reinforcing the importance of prevention and early intervention efforts. This event served as a meaningful platform to not only educate but also uplift community voices particularly those of young people while promoting healing, cultural pride, and collective action against the devastating effects of substance abuse.

Youth Ambassadors’ Leadership:

The event activities were facilitated by six active Youth Ambassadors alongside African Coalition staff. These trained Youth Ambassadors played a key role in engaging attendees, leading interactive games, and delivering presentations to families. A major highlight of the day was the spoken word performance by the Youth Ambassadors, with the powerful message: *“Children should not just be seen, they should be heard.”* This performance captured the heart of the event, emphasizing prevention, healing, and youth leadership. The event was intentionally

designed to be inclusive of all age groups, welcoming participants from as young as 4 years old to 18 and older. Each game was paired with prizes and structured to encourage active participation from both youth and caregivers. Caregivers were also engaged as supportive agents and eligible recipients of stipends for their involvement.

Event Activities Included:

Participants of all ages enjoyed classic, wellness-themed carnival games such as:

- Sack Races
- Tug-of-War
- Three-Legged Races
- Spoon Racing
- Ring Toss

The combination of youth-led programming and fun activities fostered a joyful, inclusive, and meaningful experience for all attendees.

Community Resources & Health Education:

In addition, the African Coalition invited its partner organizations specializing in health and substance abuse education. A key partner was the CORE Center, which delivered brief, family-friendly presentations focused on substance use prevention and Naloxone (Narcan) awareness. CORE staff also facilitated Narcan education and distributed over 200 Narcan toolkits directly to community members. Additional support was provided by LA Care and Valley Oasis, who offered free services, informational resources, and giveaways to the families in attendance.

Impact & Incentives:

The event offered incentives designed to encourage caregivers to stay engaged and participate actively. These incentives were developed in alignment with the LACDMH Scope of Work (SOW) and were distributed to registered attendees, with clear participation expectations outlined and acknowledged receiving the Stipends through their signature. The African Coalition exceeded its targets by providing \$75 stipends to 75 families and hosting a live raffle giveaway, which included donated gift cards and gift baskets from corporate partners and local supporters of the initiative.

Challenges:

The African Coalition has made numerous efforts over the past two months to secure a venue for this event, but access has remained difficult. Although the event was eventually held at a large county park, it was still challenging to reserve a private area. As a result, the coalition had to deploy multiple staff members to ensure the safety and security of children and their families throughout the event. Participants were happy to attend but many could not stay for the full duration. Stipends were not provided to support all participants. Overall, while addressing substance abuse remains a critical need, there are very few initiatives that are inclusive of both

youth and their caregivers in tackling this issue. Since the African Coalition is based in Los Angeles, organizing the event was particularly challenging given the location was over an hour away and the day was marked by high temperatures. Nevertheless, attendees enjoyed the refreshments, including snacks and cold sodas provided by ACPHC, which helped create a joyful and restorative environment for everyone involved.

Recommendations:

Based on our observations, the Antelope Valley communities would greatly benefit from similar events that are inclusive of both youth and their caregivers. While it was encouraging to see diverse participation at our recent event largely due to its location in a public park participants raised serious concerns about emerging challenges in their neighborhoods. Many community members reported that the recent wave of gentrification in Los Angeles has displaced vulnerable populations, contributing to a growing substance abuse crisis in Antelope Valley. Residents described feeling stigmatized, with newcomers being unfairly blamed for the spread of fentanyl, leading to increased community tensions and a sense of abandonment by local authorities. To address these pressing concerns, we strongly recommend the implementation of targeted, community-driven initiatives focused on prevention, healing, and support services for affected neighborhoods.

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