

## Mi Universidad: Empowering Youth with Popular Education Pedagogy and Community Cultural Wealth<sup>1</sup>

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Rooted in the philosophy of El Plan de Santa Barbara, the Homie UP Youth Empowerment Program (Homie UP YEP) was created by the community-based organization Universidad Popular (UP) and the National Latino Research

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Center (NLRC) at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) with the goal of making Chicana Studies curriculum available to the local community. Homie UP YEP specifically sought to meet the needs of youth by applying popular education pedagogy (Freire) to cultivate community cultural wealth (Yosso). Since 2018, Homie UP YEP's college summer-immersion program, Mi Universidad, has focused on enhancing community cultural wealth through educational attainment, life skills, health and well-being, family engagement, civic engagement, and cultural enrichment for local Chicana/Latina youth and families in North County San Diego, California. Our paper discusses Homie UP YEP's development, research, and college summer-immersion program curriculum, as well as navigating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community and programming, and centering the voices and experiences of Homie UP YEP participants and community educators.

### **Who We Are**

I, Arcela Nuñez Alvarez, am a Chicana immigrant who came from Mexico and settled in the City of San Marcos, California when I was 12 years old, where I have lived for almost forty years with my family. San Marcos is also the home of the California State University campus, where our work has resided since 1998. I began my teaching and community-organizing journey in high school when I joined MEChA. It was with MEChA that I learned precious ancestral knowledge and the importance of community service and civic participation—core values that continue to guide my personal and professional life.

Seventeen years ago, I joined the National Latino Research Center at California State University San Marcos with the vision of creating a safe and welcoming space for Brown students to come together, learn, teach, appreciate culture, and prepare for life after graduation. One of our guiding frameworks was El Plan de Santa Barbara, a plan that made abundantly clear the importance of supporting Chicana and Chicano students in their educational journey, creating programs and departments that are culturally responsive and connected to the local service community.

Seeing the need in our community to educate and support the entire family, with a group of community leaders, we started Universidad Popular. Inspired by the great educator Paulo Freire, we answered our calling to become *maestras del pueblo*, teaching for liberation. We are a nontraditional educational organization cultivating leadership, freedom, health, wisdom, and dignity.

Through our teaching, we bring to life key principles of democracy, empowering ordinary people to own our voice and use our power to shape our community.

#### *National Latino Research Center*

The mission of the National Latino Research Center (NLRC) at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of rapidly growing U.S. Latinx populations through applied action research, training, technical assistance, and the exchange of information. Specializing in applied action research, NLRC brings together key stakeholders from the community, government, nonprofit sector, and private industry to identify solutions and develop strategies to address local and regional challenges.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years ago, the NLRC joined the movement to uplift and validate the interdisciplinary process of inquiry for social change known as community-based participatory action research (PAR). PAR involves engaging community residents and stakeholders in identifying and studying a social issue, developing solutions and putting them into action. One of the ways we activate PAR is by offering student internships, service-learning, and volunteering opportunities to college students of color who are members of the local communities. We provide hands-on experiential learning and the opportunity for students to return to their communities and give back as leaders and teachers.

#### *Universidad Popular*

Universidad Popular was brought to life by a group of community leaders and educators in collaboration with Latinos y Latinas en Acción in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego, California with the mission of providing a space where Latino and Latina immigrants could convene and learn. The program expanded into North County San Diego where it has flourished and continues to grow.

Universidad Popular offers programs throughout North County San Diego with the intent of capturing community knowledge and fostering appreciation for traditional know-how while strengthening family and community cohesion. Specifically, we are bringing families together for communal learning where elders share wisdom about healing, crafts, farming, cooking, writing, etc., and youth teach technology, physical activity, multimedia, etc. The goal is to teach

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about NLRC, please visit [www.csusm.edu/nlrc](http://www.csusm.edu/nlrc).

living skills and to learn from each other. For us, it is about building self-reliance in a unique multi-generational setting and to facilitate hands-on learning experiences.

## **Community Profile**

### *The 78-Corridor: North County San Diego*

We acknowledge that the land on which we reside is the traditional territory and homelands of the Luiseño/Payómkawichum people. Today, the meeting place of CSUSM in North County San Diego and its surrounding areas is still home to the six federally recognized bands of the La Jolla, Pala, Pauma, Pechanga, Rincon, Soboba Luiseño/Payómkawichum people. It is also important to acknowledge that this land remains the shared space among the Kuupangaxwicheh/Cupeño and Kumeyaay and Ipai peoples.<sup>4</sup>

The communities along the 78-Corridor, named for the State Route 78 highway, include the cities of Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos, and Escondido. The region is geographically dispersed and includes remote rural, agricultural, and mountainous areas to the east. Latinx families of Mexican origin heavily populate the northern region of San Diego County, comprising 1 out of 3 residents.<sup>5</sup>

Latinxs comprise the largest sector of frontline essential workers in the region. Approximately half of the population is Spanish speaking, with various levels of English-speaking abilities; this includes immigrants from Mexico and Central America. We work in the northern region of San Diego County, less than 60 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border port of entry. North County San Diego is a border community surrounded by immigration checkpoints. Being part of the movement to build people power has given us first-hand knowledge of privileges and barriers affecting civic participation among immigrants and Latinx communities who are still grossly underrepresented in key civic and leadership positions.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### *Popular Education Pedagogy*

Universidad Popular uses popular education pedagogy; it presents educational material through a culturally appropriate and responsive lens in

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<sup>4</sup> For more information, please visit The California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center <https://www.csusm.edu/cicsc/>.

<sup>5</sup> See Table 1 for a demographic profile of North County San Diego.

English, Spanish and bilingual formats, which resonate with participants' histories and lived experiences. We employ Paulo Freire's approach of dialectic interchange and kinesthetic learning. An essential element to the model is empowerment and connecting students' learning with their role in creating positive social change. Universidad Popular builds on a resilient tradition of resistance known as *educación popular*, or popular education, meaning education of the people. This model of education is most commonly known as a liberating pedagogy through which an individual becomes aware of their own personal experiences and how these experiences are connected to the larger society.

### *Community Cultural Wealth*

Tara J. Yosso defines community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (77). We use this strengths-based framework that highlights the importance of beliefs and practices originating from family and cultures of immigrant communities and communities of color. Yosso's framework describes at least six forms of cultural capital, which guide our work in the following ways.

Social Capital. Supportive networks of people and community resources help families transcend the adversity in their daily lives. The NLRC has successfully built a network of community-based partners that work together to comprehensively address risk and protective factors for youth and families through services, resources, outreach and education.

Navigational Capital. ‘Critical navigational skills’ empower Homie UP YEP participants to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. Curriculum, programming, tutoring, and mentoring enhance college preparation, civic engagement, and skills for safe, responsible, and critical social media use to prepare youth and families to navigate complex social institutions and infrastructures.

Aspirational Capital. This form of capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers. The NLRC has successfully facilitated university and community resources to create a bridge for youth to attend their local university and have access to college experiences.

Resistant Capital. Knowledge of the structures of racism, nativism, sexism, classism, etc. and skills and motivation to transform such oppressive

structures can come from parents, community members and a historical legacy of resistance to subordination. Located within the 100-mile U.S.-Mexico border zone, Homie UP YEP exists in a unique region that enhances the knowledge and study of local history and civic engagement through community organizations whose mission is to advocate for local needs such as Universidad Popular, Alianza Comunitaria, and the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium (SDIRC).

Familial Capital. Those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin)—which may include immediate or extended family (living or long passed on) as well as friends who we might consider part of our *familia*—carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. Intergenerational learning approaches facilitate the integration of the family unit (e.g. parents, youth, and extended family members) and improve program commitment and civic engagement.

Linguistic Capital. The intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style, this form of capital also refers to the ability to communicate via visual art, music, poetry, and a storytelling tradition which may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, *cuentos* (stories) and *dichos* (proverbs). Trained NLRC staff and interns are bilingual and bicultural whose experiences reflect those of program participants. Communication with families and programming for youth incorporate linguistically and culturally responsive strategies.

### **Homie UP Youth Empowerment Program**

The NLRC, in collaboration with CSUSM researchers and numerous community partners, implements the Homie UP Youth Empowerment Program (Homie UP YEP) a community-based youth empowerment model for youth of color that focuses on educational attainment, civic engagement, restorative justice, and cultural enrichment. The program provides education based on critical pedagogy (Freire) with the aim of providing hope, opportunity for meaningful reflection, critical consciousness and other elements of humanity for minoritized youth. Homie UP YEP also contributes to youth wellness and development by providing an outlet for cultural appreciation and creative expression. Homie UP YEP offers educational opportunities and mitigates trauma by providing intensive and comprehensive services in the context of an after-school youth program in North County San Diego, California.

The program has been open to the community since January 2018. Until the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown in March 2020, the program operated from Centro Universidad Popular, located in the heart of the Latinx community in Vista, California. For the last year, program coordinators and staff seamlessly transitioned from in-person program delivery to virtual programming. Homie UP YEP has been able to continue serving youth and families during the pandemic shutdown, facilitating resources and information related to COVID-19 concerns and needs such as the facilitation of pandemic relief funds, unemployment benefit applications, and rental assistance through community networks.

### *Homie UP YEP Research Design*

The research and evaluation plan focuses on assessing the effectiveness and impact of the after-school youth program. We assess the risk factors that hinder the opportunities of youth at the institutional and systemic level, and the protective factors necessary to improve social, health, and educational outcomes. We use quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate impact; data are collected over time, first during enrollment as baseline data, followed by annual assessments.

Quantitatively, we collect and analyze demographic data from youth and their families such as gender, race, and ethnicity. We collaborate with the local school district to collect and analyze academic progress through GPA, college preparatory course completion, promotion rates, graduate rates, and disciplinary actions. We also collect data on an ongoing basis of youth and family participation in the program through attendance and participation logs, tutoring logs, and pre-/post-tests to assess knowledge gained during workshops. Furthermore, we conduct two national surveys: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) that assesses youth's risk of violence, substance use, and nutrition, and the Child & Youth Resiliency Measure (CYRM) that assesses youth's resilience at the individual, family, and community level.

Qualitatively, we engage with youth and families to document their experiences through reflection sessions, journal entries, oral histories, and community conversations. Monthly Family Nights engage parents in discussion about their concerns, needs, and recommendations to improve the program. Community educators conduct activities with youth to teach about local history and document their own family histories through video storytelling.

### *Homie UP YEP Demographics*

Table 2 provides the demographic profile of Homie UP YEP participants and their families over a four-year period, collected during enrollment or baseline. Youth participation in the program increased over the three-year period, from 55 in Year 1 to close to 100 youth and families in Year 3. Enrollment and participation decreased during Year 4 as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. We have maintained an equal number of students based on gender. All youth are Latinx, and most are of Mexican origin. However, we see a growing number of students of Central American descent. When asked to share their racial background, students self-reported they are white, black, or Native American. Most student chose “other” as their racial category and provided responses such as Hispanic, Latinx, Mexican, Chicanx, or Azteca/Mayan. We collect family information including household income and housing. Most families have a median monthly income of less than \$2,000 and live in multi-unit complexes such as apartments or condominiums.

### **Mi Universidad Narratives**

#### *Mi Universidad 2020 Curriculum*

The COVID-19 public health crisis forced an unexpected shift to remote youth programming for Homie UP YEP, which demanded innovative strategies for overcoming obstacles to teaching, access, and support in an uncertain time. Rising to the challenge, the Homie UP YEP team developed a relevant and culturally appropriate curriculum of integrated courses responsive to the needs of our local youth in a virtual learning environment. In the summer of 2020, Mi Universidad classes focused on Chicanx/Latinx communities, experiences, and local history, nurturing connections with family/cultural roots and a legacy of resilient resistance to white supremacy, systemic racism, and police violence disproportionately targeting Black and Brown communities. Classes also focused on college preparation, identity exploration, self-care, coping and emotional intelligence, ensuring a fair and accurate count in the 2020 U.S. Census, and being safe, responsible, and critical users/producers of (social) media for social good.

Introduction to Chicanx Studies. *Community Educators: Lilian Serrano, Gemma Serrano, and Karina Romero.* The major purpose of this course was to educate students to be politically, socially, and economically conscious about their personal connections to local and national history. This course facilitated

discussions concerning personal and social identities, specifically Chicax identity, and the historical context behind the development of the Chicax movement.

Media Studies: Media & Youth Impact. *Community Educators: Ricardo Favela, Stephanie Martinez, and Gemma Serrano.* The goal of this course was to have students learn how to use and filter media in a critical, healthy, and responsible manner and to learn storytelling as a means of empowerment. Students learned video production and produced original videos. The class aimed to have students make the transition from being media consumers to media producers and engage in the battle of stories and narratives regarding Brown youth.

Raíces de Acción. *Community Educators: Rafael Hernández, Jennifer Lopez, and Rosalva Romero.* Learning activities and discussions explored systemic racism, identity, self-care, mindfulness meditation, and critical reflection to gain perspectives on the struggles of current and previous generations and connect with a historical legacy of resilient resistance to oppression. Guided by conceptual frameworks including *nepantla* (Anzaldúa), *in lak' ech*, *panche be*, *yaxche baalche*, *tezcacatlipoca*, *huitzilopochtli*, *quetzalcoatl*, *xipe totec* (Rodríguez), community cultural wealth (Yosso), and integrating knowledge gained from other Mi Universidad classes, Raíces de Acción supported youth leaders in developing practical strategies for change to build a better future for our communities and ourselves in positive, progressive, and creative ways.

Ourstory: K-6 Reading Circle. *Community Educators: Ana M. Ardón, Jennifer Lopez, Monica Muro, Jessica Ramirez, Karina Romero, Rosalva Romero, Angelica Santiago, and Gemma Serrano.* A reading program for students in grades K-6 designed to strengthen academic activities and improve students' reading abilities during summer, centered in the principles of popular education to promote and increase the knowledge of Latinx and Chicax histories, community experiences, and storytelling.

Second Step. *Community Educators: Mario Millan, Jennifer Lopez, and Rosalva Romero.* The *Second Step* (Committee for Children) curriculum sought to address and promote emotional wellness in the participants. It was adapted and modified to meet our community and youth needs by Homie UP YEP staff to ensure cultural responsiveness and highlight social issues. The students participated in discussions about identity, social groups, stereotypes and perceptions associated with social groups, and handling emotions when faced

with overwhelming negative interactions. The Identity Map activity, especially, served to bring to mind the interaction between someone's personal identity and their social and political world.

Our Communities Count. *Community Educators: Ana M. Ardón, Jessica Ramírez, Rosalva Romero, and Angelica Santiago.* The year 2020 materialized thoughts of a historic presidential election and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, 2020 also marked the decennial census count. Under the Trump Administration, communities of color across the nation endured four years of Trump spewing anti-immigrant rhetoric and enacting policies that were attacks towards immigrants and communities of color. The 2020 Census was no exception with the Trump Administration's attempt to add a citizenship question, shifting the 2020 census deadlines, and claiming that undocumented community members would be excluded from the census count.

NLRC and UP were part of the Count Me 2020 Census Education & Outreach Campaign in Region 10 of California (San Diego and Imperial Counties) and worked diligently to continue outreach efforts and promote census engagement during and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic alongside a collective of tíos, tías, students, and elders in the Latino community of North County San Diego. Yosso explains that *familial capital* entails "a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a broader understanding of kinship" (79). NLRC and UP utilized the community cultural wealth model to work alongside *familias* and local community members to ensure Latinx presence was not only recognized via a complete count, but would also be monetized via vital federal funding that would come to the states to contribute to the well-being of every Californian<sup>6</sup>.

Under the leadership of Dr. Arcela Nuñez Alvarez, NLRC and UP integrated an outreach approach that was multi-generational, highlighting census questionnaire completion as a civic responsibility and civic duty, and elevated community networks to spread census messaging. Universidad Popular developed

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<sup>6</sup> As of April 26, 2021, the United States Census Bureau (USCB) released apportionment data indicating that California had lost a congressional seat bringing the total down to 52. By September 30, 2021 states and the public are expected to have access to the final redistricting data. To access the "2020 Census Apportionment Counts Press Kit" that contains details on the data and a news release by the USCB from April 26, 2021, please visit <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-apportionment-data.html>. To stay informed on the redistricting process, access the 2020 California Citizens Redistricting Commission website, <https://www.wedrawthelinesca.org/>.

a culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum that the Homie UP YEP program utilized and modified into a youth version titled “Our Communities Count.” The curriculum entailed educating youth about the significance of the decennial census and training youth to utilize their power and connections to inform and motivate their social networks to complete the 2020 Census with the intention of increasing response rates in the community. The curriculum embraced census education as a form of empowerment and covered the following topics: Census 101 education, the history of race & ethnicity on the census, myths & community concerns about the census, and census messaging. At the beginning of the course, many youth leaders were unaware of the significance of the 2020 Census, but by week six youth leaders were working to reassure their families about the census with messaging on confidentiality and the facilitation and completion of census questionnaires in various households. In addition, many students also discovered that their families were aware of the 2020 Census due to their involvement in the outreach initiatives with the NLRC and UP. Youth leaders and their families worked to spread the message: We All Count / Todos Contamos. See below Testimonios from youth leaders.

College 101. Community Educators: Monica Muro, Rosalva Romero, and Angelica Santiago. By having a course in the summer where we educate and give resources for higher education, we are giving back to the community. Many coordinators and students within program are first generation college students and many have gone above and beyond to earn their master's degrees and Ph.D.s. We know the students want to learn and we know their potential. Working with these students the past year and a half, I (Monica Muro) have seen them grow as they go from adolescence to college-age young adults.

The College Readiness curriculum was taught with the intention of presenting students the opportunity to envision college as a possibility. During this class, we used the *Realizing the College Dream: Teacher Adviser Guide* curriculum developed by the Center for Education Partnerships, University of California Berkeley, ECMC Foundation. We tailored the curriculum to meet our community and youth needs. Additionally, we used storytelling to foster aspirational capital by sharing our own experiences transitioning from K-12 education to institutions of higher education.

Aspirational capital is defined as the ability to be resilient while also maintaining dreams. Patricia Gándara and others have demonstrated that, compared to other cohorts in the US, Chicanxs have minimal educational

outcomes (55). However, Chicanxs demonstrate high aspirations for the futures of their children. With storytelling and advice, we nurtured aspiration within social and cultural contexts and helped establish and build the goals needed to confront oppressive barriers. As argued by Yosso, these stories nurture a culture of possibility as they represent “the creation of a history that would break the links between parents’ current occupational status and their children’s future academic attainment” (78).

Our approach to the College Readiness course was to provide students the tools and skills necessary to navigate and succeed in the higher education system, fostering navigational capital (Yosso). We believe education goes far beyond the classroom. It is acquired knowledge that resides in our *familias* and *comunidades*. Education is transformative, an ongoing and endless process of growth. This class was intended to invigorate students to execute their leadership and readiness skills as scholars and encourage them to become active advocates in their community.

At the start of the class, students were asked where they saw themselves ten years from now, in hopes that they would approach this class with an enthusiastic and eager stance. Students held discussions on education and job opportunities by exploring individual interests and connecting those interests to potential careers. They examined this question using a Career Interest Survey and independent career research with the support of community educators. Secondly, this class introduced various approaches to prepare for college admission while discussing the benefits of a college education. To incorporate a better understanding in the college admissions process and the requirements of selected colleges or universities, students learned how to conduct research on State and Private Universities as well as Community Colleges. The youth were divided into breakout rooms where they worked with an instructor to further explore the college or university of their choice. Students also designed their own Individual Academic Action Plan to strategize and organize their future objectives. In addition, the curriculum included debunking the myths of financial aid and covered the numerous sources and types of financial aid available for students and their families. We also debunked the myths of attending college as a first-generation student. Finally, the class invited North County San Diego community educators to speak on their journey in academia and provide insight to first generation students navigating higher education spaces.

*Testimonios: Mi Universidad Experience*

**Voice, Spaces, and Values**

My name is Cindy Torres, and I have been a student in the Youth Empowerment Program for 4 years. I am currently in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Vista High School. During the summer, I was able to share some of my own experiences to contribute to the classes we were taught. For Media Studies, we shared a picture of our ‘story objects’—something that represents us and is important to us. I shared my ‘Winnie the Pooh’ stuffed animal because it has been with me for over 14 years, since I was born. We—all the students and staff—also collaborated on making a map of where our parents were born, and where we were born for our Chicana Studies class by marking the locations with different colored stickers. This helped paint a picture of where our parents were from, where they were raised, and later where they migrated from Mexico to California to make our lives better. Lastly, something that was important to me from the *Raíces de Acción* class was that we would always repeat the In’Lak Ech poem: Tú eres mi otro yo / You are my other me. Si te hago daño a ti / If I do harm to you, Me hago daño a mí mismo / I do harm to myself. Si te amo y respeto / If I love and respect you, Me amo y respeto yo / I love and respect myself (Valdez).

This poem, In’Lak Ech, shows that we are family, we are there for each other, we would love each other even if some days we would not get along. We would always be together, have fun, and be positive toward each other. We were welcoming toward each other, and we would welcome whoever came through our doors with open arms. Everybody, the students and the staff, was kind and treated you with respect. We were always allowed to use our voices and speak on what we thought about things going on and especially using our voices to keep the space safe and positive for everyone, to stick up for one another. The space at Centro Universidad Popular was like our home. We had areas to relax and hang out with friends, we would always have snacks and food to eat after school, and we would find so many different things to have fun with after we finished with our work. The program was focused on building connections, providing students with a space for them, and sharing knowledge between the staff, participants, and families.

### **Positive and Motivated to Engage: Difference in School and the Program**

In school, we learned some skills that can help us in our work, but we did not know we had other skills until we got to the Youth Empowerment Program, and the staff and tutors helped us develop them. We became much better at using these skills, and we became better people because we did not focus on just academic skills, we were learning life skills. Something else that was different in the program was that people in school and outside of school have told me that my thinking is ‘wrong’; they want me to ‘Do things how I want you to do them.’ It never felt like that in the program; we were never told the way we did things was ‘wrong’, we were just taught how to do things differently and if what we were doing worked for us then the staff and tutors would move forward with our ways. We were also free to do what we wanted. We did not have as many rules in the program as there are in school. This allowed us to have better and more active social lives and have our own space with no one to judge us. The staff would check in on us and watch over us to make sure we were safe in whatever we were doing.

### **Pandemic and Stay at Home Orders**

Due to the pandemic and being in quarantine, we cannot do everything we used to do; we cannot be together, close, or in contact. Everyone has to go through this and go through a virtual world. Now we do tutoring online, we do workshops online. All the stuff we used to do normally in the program we are doing online now. We still try to make the online workshops fun. Just because we cannot be together or be in the same place, it does not mean we do not like to stay in touch or have fun when we connect. However, something positive did come out of quarantine and this pandemic. In my family, we did not used to talk as much as we do now. We would always just wake up and eat breakfast then go to work or school. Then when we came home, the only time we would be together and talking again was during dinner. The pandemic and lockdown have helped me connect with my family again, while still getting all the help and knowledge we need from the program online.

### **Our Communities Count!**

Being able to explain what I learned about the census to my mom was an eye-opening experience for both of us. She did not know anything about the census until I told her about all the benefits that come from completing it, and being from Mexico, she was surprised that everyone living in the U.S. was

supposed to be counted in the census, not just those who are citizens. I was excited to be part of the census workshop during the summer because my family learned that we count, all of us. This will mean the communities could get more help with schools and other things that people need.

### **Insights of Youth Leaders on Being Trusted Messengers**

As Homie UP YEP prepared youth leaders like Cindy Torres to become trusted messengers for their own families, the insights youth leaders were able to relay to their families became apparent. Another Homie UP YEP youth leader, Salma Lopez, age 14, recalls, “From this experience I was able to learn ways to communicate with my family members as well as learn what they already know about the census. One of the pictures [submitted during class] is important since I was able to explain to my mom more about how the census benefits everyone in the family including me since it will allow funding for schools and parks.” Salma’s younger sister, Jackie Lopez, age 13, also discussed her experience when talking about the census with her father, “I shared the information I learned with my family and taught them more of what they already knew. My parents were a bit surprised about the benefits of doing the census.”

Keeping in mind the political landscape in which 2020 left all of us, the Census curriculum was one of many ways in which communal power and informed action was promoted. In the words of Julian Ibañez, age 14, “Everyone matters and should be counted no matter what because it helps the small communities so they'll be able to build roads, help fund schools and if people don't get counted it could affect the community so you should always be counted because it would affect the people around you.”

### **Conclusion**

Through the teachings of El Plan de Santa Barbara, Popular Education, Community Cultural Wealth, and reclaiming our stories, we know we have the duty to build and nurture the bridge from higher education institutions to our communities. Working with our communities, we can reclaim our space, be civically engaged, and dismantle the social, cultural, and economic barriers that have been placed in our communities. Furthermore, we envision the replication of the Homie UP Youth Empowerment Program in other settings with the same vision to create a safe and welcoming space for Brown students to come together, to learn together, to teach together, to appreciate our culture, and most importantly to make a difference in our communities.

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Table 1. North County San Diego Demographic Profile

Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Latinxs comprise close to 40 percent of the population in the 78-Corridor of North County San Diego (Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos, and Escondido), reaching over half in cities like Vista and Escondido. (2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates)</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less than one-third of the population aged 18-24 is a high school graduate and only 8 percent has a bachelor’s degree or higher. (2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates)</li> <li>- Latina/o/x students on average represent over 60 percent of the population in K-12 system and most students in continuation and alternative schools (AY 2019-20, Ed-Data.org)</li> </ul>
Juvenile Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- San Diego County has the second highest juvenile arrest rate (19.4) with San Bernardino at 23.0 in California.</li> <li>- Arrests rates are highest among Latina/o/x youth (22) and Black youth (69) compared to White youth (14.9).</li> </ul>
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 28 percent of the population lives in economic hardship at below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. (2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates)</li> </ul>

Table 2. Homie UP YEP Demographics

Homie UP YEP Demographics		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
		N=55	N=70	N=96	N=76
Gender	Male	30	34	50	38
	Female	25	36	46	36
Race/Ethnicity	Mexican	55	70	96	75
	Central American	2	2	2	1
	White	10	34	22	18
	Black	0	2	4	4
	Native American	1	1	3	2
Household	Median Monthly Income	\$ 1,800	\$ 1,625	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
	Apartment/Condo	55 %	42%	55 %	60 %
	Single-family home	36 %	47 %	27 %	25 %
	Mobile home	9 %	11 %	18 %	15 %
School Level	Middle school	60 %	59 %	63 %	53 %
	High school	40 %	41 %	37 %	47 %