

The Opportunity

The Broward Youth Coalition (BYC), a project of the United Way of Broward County, offers youth the perfect mix of collaboration and independence. Young people have the support to voice their opinions and learn ways to advocate in their local community. BYC incorporates mindfulness into daily programs through yoga and deep breathing so that youth can better tackle the greater issues of today's world. The diversity of students also creates opportunities to explore possibilities in new cultures and break linguistic barriers in government policy. The home away from home BYC provides is filled with unique community service and professional experience opportunities that uplift youth and boost their personal confidence.



In Practice

The Broward Youth Coalition afterschool program addresses substance and alcohol use prevention and amplifies mental health awareness. The program consists of students in grades 6 through 12 in Broward County schools who are looking to further develop their leadership skills and participate in more community service projects.

A typical day in the program starts off with a rose, bud, and thorn icebreaker. Each student has an opportunity to share their favorite aspect or most memorable moment from the program (rose), something that could be further developed (bud), and a negative element or area that needs to be improved (thorn). After getting to know any new students, youth will plan for an upcoming event, such as Alternative Spring Break or the Youth Leadership Institute, or have a guest speaker cover topics that are currently relevant to youth nationwide.

There are many opportunities for youth to participate in public speaking engagements with a news outlet such as PBS or NBC, and at town hall meetings with our school board members. Many BYC students are interested in public policy, so workshops break down issues from the vaping epidemic to online bullying, allowing for open discussions. Food, drinks, and BYC merchandise are also provided to encourage a collaborative and supportive environment for all. Many students are first-generation, low-income, or from Title 1 schools, making this group a place to open up about the struggles that make them unique.

There are daily opportunities that include challenges, such as getting active, where you can begin tracking your activity for a healthier lifestyle and work with others to do the same. For Red Ribbon Week, youth made baskets full of positive affirmations that were wrapped around individual lollipops to distribute to Broward County students. They created videos about new legislation that were sent to the Florida State Capitol and shared their stories from events such as Rally to Tally, a three-day field trip where students experience Florida legislative sessions.

The program emphasizes kindness, understanding, inclusion, compassion, and respect. Many students serve as selfless leaders in other capacities. Students can start BYC clubs at their own schools, inviting them to lead initiatives such as "Mind, Body, Medicine." Overall, the Broward Youth Coalition and United Way not only educate youth on rising issues, but also supply them with the resources to amplify their voices in any room they step into.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Ava Havidic

The Broward Youth Coalition, United Way of Broward County, FL

“BYC has provided us with the opportunity for one-on-one job interview practice. We have practiced introducing ourselves, asking inquisitive questions, and making comments about our work experience. We also received assistance with choosing the best attire and understanding proper etiquette. Before having a news interview, we would be able to practice answering questions and becoming comfortable in conversations. This preparation helped me in my role as a Youth Ambassador at the Afterschool Alliance, enabling me to interact with other Youth Ambassadors in professional settings, such as livestreams. Another helpful aspect of BYC is the opportunity to present at various events. At the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), which had over 500 attendees, we led presentations on advocacy and yoga sessions for youth. We also had the chance to introduce and interact with guest speakers. Overall, my confidence was boosted and my anxiety levels declined with all the practice BYC provided me with.”



Outcomes

Students have said, “BYC has turned my life around, especially in the way I ask for help. My grades improved, and my involvement in school increased with the skills I have learned.” BYC students have earned scholarships through QuestBridge and the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation, which highlighted how district leadership in BYC made all the difference. Many students also gain admission to top universities such as Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Stanford. These opportunities make all the difference in the futures of students who come from marginalized communities and are passionate about breaking generational barriers.

The Challenge

Despite 89% of Florida parents supporting public funding for afterschool programs and 80% of voters nationally wanting federal, state, and local leaders to provide more funding for afterschool programs, too many young people are missing out. Nearly 25 million children are not in an afterschool program but want to be, including more than 1.4 million children in Florida. It’s evident that greater investment in afterschool and summer programs is needed to ensure that all youth have the same opportunities as the young people in the Broward Youth Coalition.