

PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Southeast Asian Young Men's Group

Seattle, WA

163

Average number of students served after school during the school year

45%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- ▶ City of Seattle
- ▶ Private donors

Building self-awareness and self-confidence through youth voice and choice

New research tells us that the adolescent years are a highly important developmental period for brain growth and “the second most critical period of development.” However, there are factors at both the individual and community levels that impact the development process. This includes risk factors that increase the likelihood that one will take part in unhealthy behaviors, as well as protective factors that spur healthy behaviors and development. Young people need a continuous system of support from birth through adolescence into young adulthood, creating the conditions that help them thrive and build the skills and attributes that will have a positive influence on their lives as they face thousands of decisions each day. Afterschool and summer learning programs are a part of this continuous system of support, providing services during a critical time of development for young people that will help children grow their strengths, cope with the complications of life, and lead healthful lives to become healthy adults.

Overview

The Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) was founded in 1973 as a social justice-oriented organization focused on eliminating the barriers and disparities that impact Asian-American and Pacific Islander communities. ACRS employs culturally sensitive practices as a fundamental element of its work. As such, it provides comprehensive multilingual and multicultural services to underserved populations across King County. This includes an afterschool program for high school males of Southeast Asian descent (Cambodian, Cham, Filipino, Hmong, Lao, Khmu, Mien, and Vietnamese) from refugee and immigrant families to explore their identity through filmmaking called the *Southeast Asian Young Men's group (SEAYM)*.

A typical day for students

ACRS staff warmly welcome students into the youth room of their building, where middle school and high school students gather around to sit, do homework, and get settled while they enjoy the hot meals served every afternoon. Next, students take part in a wide variety of enrichment opportunities, selecting activities that align with their unique interests. Program offerings vary each day, and include music, arts, sports, cooking, and mentoring, as well as

civic engagement activities. As a counseling agency, ACRS program staff are able to connect afterschool program youth with additional social and health services as needed and are conscious about integrating trauma-informed practices into the entire scope of their afterschool programming.

Outcomes

The program reports that all SEAYM youth take part in at least three prosocial activities, which range from resume workshops to documentary filmmaking trainings, as well as community-focused programming, which includes peer mentorship groups and a young women's empowerment group. An internal analysis of the program's youth development outcome survey found a 94 percent positive response rate to the statement, "I am more connected to my community/culture," and a 93 percent positive response rate to the statement, "I have a better understanding about my history/culture/neighborhood." When asked about their experience in the program, students expressed the positive role that the program has had in their lives, with quotes that include, "I was able to meet new people with similar experiences as me," "I learned about where my family and culture came from," and, "I am happy here."

Program characteristics

For participants of SEAYM, connecting with their own culture can be healing. The program places culture at the center of its afterschool programming and integrates project-based learning to help high school boys of Southeast Asian descent explore their cultural identity in the context of their peers, school, family, and community. In particular, the program digs into concepts such as identity, belonging, and stereotypes and prejudices.

The documentary filmmaking process is a tool that SEAYM uses to generate dialogue about important topics in the lives of program participants. Program staff, who have an authentic understanding of the cultural contexts of the young men in the program, help guide discussions by creating an inviting and safe space for each person to share their lived experiences. Youth are encouraged to take ownership of their stories and work together to create a visual product that elevates the youth perspective. Throughout the storytelling process, youth reflect on how they view themselves. This builds awareness and confidence in who they are, where they come from, and how they fit in to the world.

Both listening and sharing can be an avenue for learning and growth, leading to greater resiliency. Program participants find telling their stories to be cathartic and empowering, and find hearing stories that relate to their own lives to be self-validating and motivating. In the past, youth have worked on projects addressing personal challenges such as substance use and recovery, historical trauma, racism, and the effect of generational differences on parental relationships. For example, students in the program created a film called *Model Minority Stereotype*, which draws attention to the statistics that show high school dropout rates among Southeast Asians are higher compared to other Asian groups, and *Why I Don't Smoke*, a compilation of first-hand stories with



Challenges

The importance of the adolescent years: Science shows that, from birth through young adulthood, our brains are continuously developing: brain pathways grow stronger, information is processed more rapidly, and we build more complex connections that enable more complex thinking. A child's adolescent years hold enormous potential to grow and develop the skills—from building relationships to learning self-control—that they will need in adulthood. It is also a time when adolescents are in a more vulnerable state and their surrounding environments and supports—particularly non-familial supports—play a significant role in their development.

The effect of our surroundings: Research has found that our surroundings at the community, family, and individual levels can have a positive or a harmful effect on our development. Poverty, community violence, conflict within the family, and parent or family members that struggle with alcohol or drug misuse are just a few of the risk factors that exist at the community and family levels.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Close to half of children in the U.S. from zero through age 17 have experienced at least one ACE, an experience, such as being a victim of violence or having a parent or guardian who has passed away, that could have a negative and lasting effect on one's health and well-being.

Individual risk factors: Depression, cigarette use, and substance use and misuse are also risk factors young people grapple with today. In 2017, 32 percent of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for persistent periods of time, 17 percent seriously considered attempting suicide, 14 percent reported misusing opioids, and e-cigarette use increased by 78 percent among high schoolers and 48 percent among middle schoolers from 2017 to 2018.

Read [Afterschool: Fostering Protective Factors that Can Last a Lifetime](#) to learn more.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Risk factors and protective factors are present at the individual, family, and community levels. Below are examples of risk and protective factors for adolescents at the various levels.



Individual



Family



Community



Risk Factors

- ▶ Low self-esteem
- ▶ Inability to communicate
- ▶ Substance use and misuse
- ▶ Family conflict
- ▶ Parent substance use
- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Lack of adult supervision
- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Exposure to a community or school related traumatic event or violence
- ▶ Favorable community or peer group attitude toward alcohol and drug use



Protective Factors

- ▶ High self-esteem
- ▶ Positive self-image
- ▶ Positive peer relationships
- ▶ Engagement in school
- ▶ Supportive relationships
- ▶ Clear expectations for behavior
- ▶ Stability and consistency
- ▶ Positive adult mentor
- ▶ Engagement in school or community activities
- ▶ Healthy peer groups

Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Risk and Protective Factors for Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Across the Life Cycle."

Southeast Asian high school students discussing their journey of reaching the decision to not use marijuana.

Program history

Southeast Asian Young Men's group began as a rotating class for high school students in 2000. As an outlet to discuss culture, history, and identity formation, the elective class grew organically into an afterschool filmmaking program. Since 2007, ACRS has been running SEAYM as an afterschool program, while also continuing to offer classes during the school day in eight middle schools and high schools across three different school districts. ACRS has also expanded programming to young women.

Recommendations

for building self-awareness and self-confidence through youth voice and choice:

- ▶ You don't need fancy equipment to uplift the voices of youth. Digital storytelling can be just as meaningful of an experience when recorded through technology as simple as a cell phone camera.
- ▶ Lay the groundwork before starting an afterschool program. Evaluate the risk factors and protective factors that are relevant to your community to ensure that your program is adequately addressing youth needs.



Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org