



Empowering Young Minds: Guiding Youth Through Higher Education, Career Readiness, and Mental Health



The Monarchs

Larissa Michelle Avalos, Autumn Nicole Carpenter, Gabriela Chavez Andrade, and Vanessa Rubio

INTRODUCTION

Project Purpose & Description

The Empowering Young Minds workshops aimed to reduce rates of Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) (13-20) homelessness in the Long Beach 90813 zip code by increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors of homelessness. To accomplish this, the workshops provided youth with tools and resources to succeed in higher education, navigate careers, and support their mental well-being.

Social Problem & Focus Population

Homelessness is a pervasive challenge in Long Beach's 90813 community, where many individuals face poverty, limited educational opportunities, and a lack of access to mental health resources. The Empowering Young Minds workshops were developed to strengthen protective factors including education, career readiness, and mental well-being for TAY (13-20).

Scope of Social Problem

Community Stakeholder Interviews

- Homelessness was evident throughout several community assessments conducted in Long Beach 90813 zip code.
- During an interview, Martha Cota, founder and CEO of Latinos in Action California (LIAC), expressed homelessness as a challenge in addition to parents' strong desire for youth empowerment programs, promoting higher education, career readiness, and mental health.

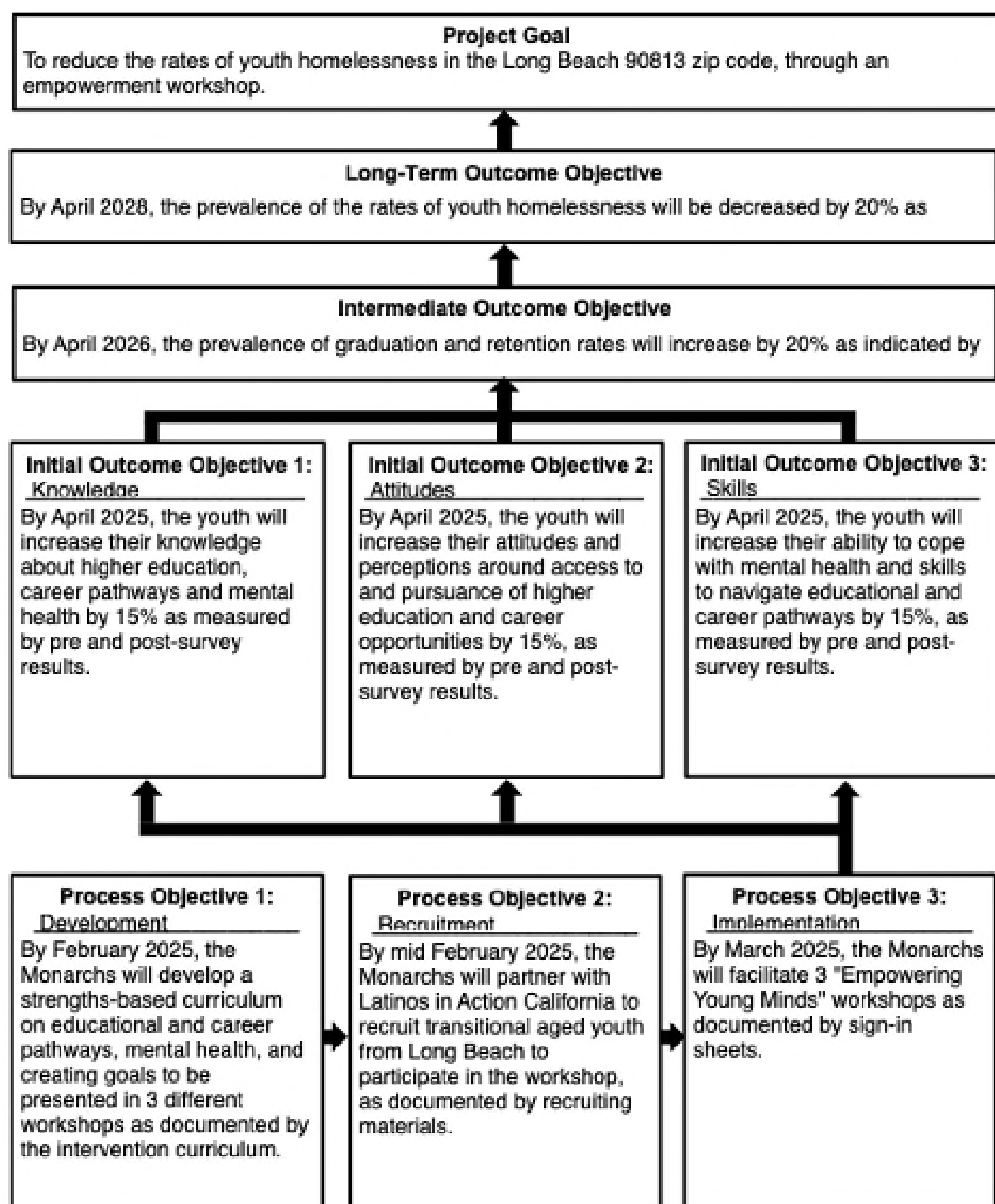
Secondary Data

- The 2024 Long Beach Point in Time Count reported 3,376 individuals experiencing homelessness, with 2.2% identified as TAY.
- Contributing factors of homelessness include low education attainment (46.1%) unemployment (37.1%), and mental health challenges (16.3%).

Alignment to Specialization

The project aligns with the Child and Family Wellbeing specialization by using a strength-based approaches to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors associated with youth homelessness. Through a series of three workshops, it promoted positive youth development by providing essential tools and resources. This approach supported the overall goal of empowering youth and families to thrive.

PROJECT OVERVIEW, OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES



METHODS

To evaluate the effectiveness of the workshops, The Monarchs distributed paper and electronic pre- and post-surveys completed by participants, for exploratory purposes using a pre-experimental design to analyze mixed methods data. The questions in the surveys were tailored to the workshop content to measure youths' knowledge, skills and perception of the topic. Participants (N=21) were recruited through outreach flyers on school campuses and phone calls to families. Qualitative data analysis was used to identify common themes that surfaced during assessment of workshop evaluation, based on all responses from the Google Forms.

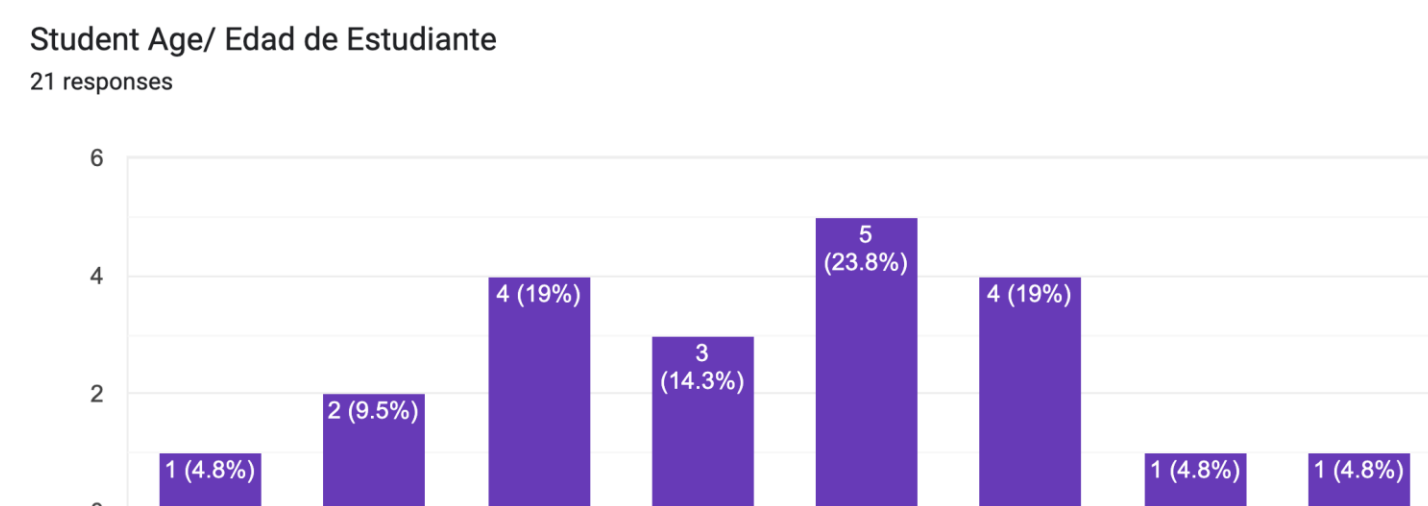
RESULTS

Participant Characteristics (N=21)

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N=21)

Variables	n	%
Higher Education Awareness		
High	2	9.5
Moderate	11	52.4
Limited	5	23.8
None	3	14.3
Race/Ethnicity* (n=2)		
Black or African American	1	4.8
Hispanic or Latinx	21	100
Age (n=9)		
Mean	16	
Std. Dev.	2.73	
Min.	12	
Max	20	

Note: *American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, and White categories were omitted due to lack of data.



Results

Table 2. Post Survey Responses to Evaluation Questions on Increasing Knowledge and Perceptions in Higher Education Options, Career Paths, and Mental Health Among Youth

	Not at All Important	Slightly Important	Pretty Important	Important	Very Important
As a result of all three workshops....					
1. How important do you think higher education (or trade school, community college) is for future success? (n=28)	0 (n=0)	3.6% (n=1)	21.4% (n=6)	35.7% (n=10)	39.3% (n=11)
2. How important do you think mental health is? (n=20)	0 (n=0)	0 (n=0)	0 (n=0)	30% (n=6)	70% (n=14)
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. I know what the A-G requirements are to graduate from high school. (n=14)	0 (n=0)	0 (n=0)	21.4% (n=3)	35.7% (n=5)	42.9% (n=6)

Table 3. Pre Survey Responses to Evaluation Questions on Current Knowledge and Perceptions of Higher Education Options, Career Paths, and Mental Health Among Youth

Perspectives on workshop topics....	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Pretty Important	Important	Very Important
1. Higher education influences life satisfaction and financial stability. ¹ (n=21)	0 (n=0)	9.5% (n=2)	19.1% (n=4)	33.3% (n=7)	38.1% (n=8)
2. How important is mental health to you? (n=20)	5.0% (n=1)	0 (n=0)	15.0% (n=3)	55.0% (n=11)	25.0% (n=5)
	Not at all Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Very Familiar		
3. How familiar are you with the A-G requirements for high school graduation? (n=21)	33.3% (n=7)	42.9% (n=9)	23.8% (n=5)		

Note :¹ To ensure consistent and accurate data, the original 'True/False' responses were modified: 'True' encompasses the categories of 'Pretty Important to Very Important', while 'False' encompasses 'Not at All Important' to 'Slightly Important'. The data shown above was inferred from the results of Question 1 in **Table 2**. Statistical inference was utilized to collect the above data.

RESOURCES

City of Long Beach. (2024). *2024 City of Long Beach homeless point in time count*. https://www.longbeach.gov/globalassets/city-news/media-library/documents/2024_homeless-count_final

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022b). "Educational Attainment." *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1501*, 2022. Retrieved December 5, 2024. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSGST5Y2022.S1501?q=education+in+90813>

CONCLUSION

Analysis of Findings

Results indicated that participants increased knowledge in key areas such as post-secondary education and career pathways, A-G graduation requirements, and the value of effective coping skills. Youth also showed a shift in perception, recognizing the benefits of higher education, the importance of mental health, and the impact of adopting a growth mindset over a fixed one. Additionally, participants gained practical skills, including how to manage emotional challenges and how to develop SMART goals to support their academic and career aspirations.

Limitations

- Participants did not remain the same across all three workshops.
- Workshops were only hosted at LIAC, limiting the number of participants.
- Workshop dates and times may have conflicted with participants' external priorities.
- Transportation barriers may have been experienced by youth at schools.

Recommendations & Implications

Practice

- The project highlighted that community-based programs effectively meet youth needs by building trust and engagement. To ensure sustainability, other programs can adopt similar collaborative models, involving local organizations and schools in planning and delivery. We suggest incorporating more group work and hands-on activities, as requested by youth participants. We also suggest inviting guest speakers to present on specific areas of expertise in alignment with workshop topics.

Policy

- The workshops demonstrated the importance of community-driven youth programs that support education, emotional well-being, and career readiness. Policymakers should fund and support partnerships between schools, local organizations, and youth programs to ensure sustained impact and meaningful youth engagement.

Research

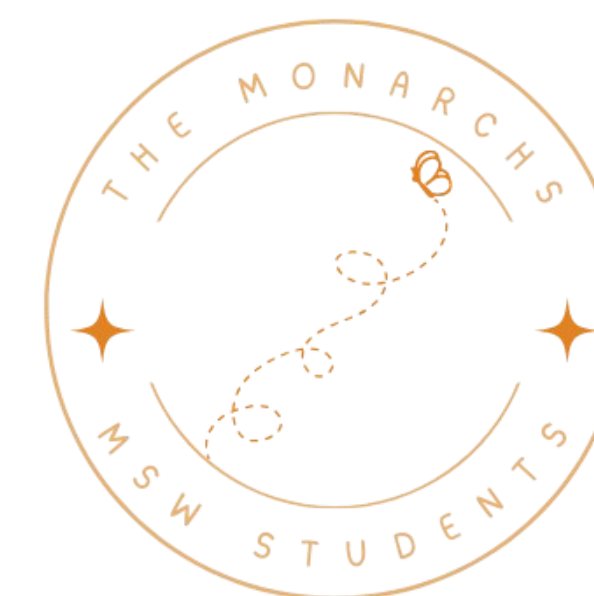
- The Monarchs' workshops enhanced emotional resilience and career readiness, highlighting the need for long-term research on community-based youth programs. Tracking participants and assessing key components will guide improvements and support sustained investment.

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Martha Cota
Founder and Chief Executive Director
Latinos In Action California

"Our mission is to create a more just and equitable society for all through solidarity, respect, and action. Our values include solidarity, respect, and action."

Name of Collaborator	Contributions
Martha Cota Founder and Chief Executive Director martha@latinosinactioncalifornia.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assisted with outreach and workshop coordinationProvided materials and the use of LIAC center as a venueContributed by sharing ideas and input during the planning of the workshops



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply thankful to Dr. Rashida Crutchfield and Martha Cota for their invaluable support throughout the project. We are also sincerely grateful to the participants of LIAC, whose engagement and insights were essential to our work. Finally, we acknowledge the 90813 community, as your stories and perspectives shaped the direction and impact of this project.