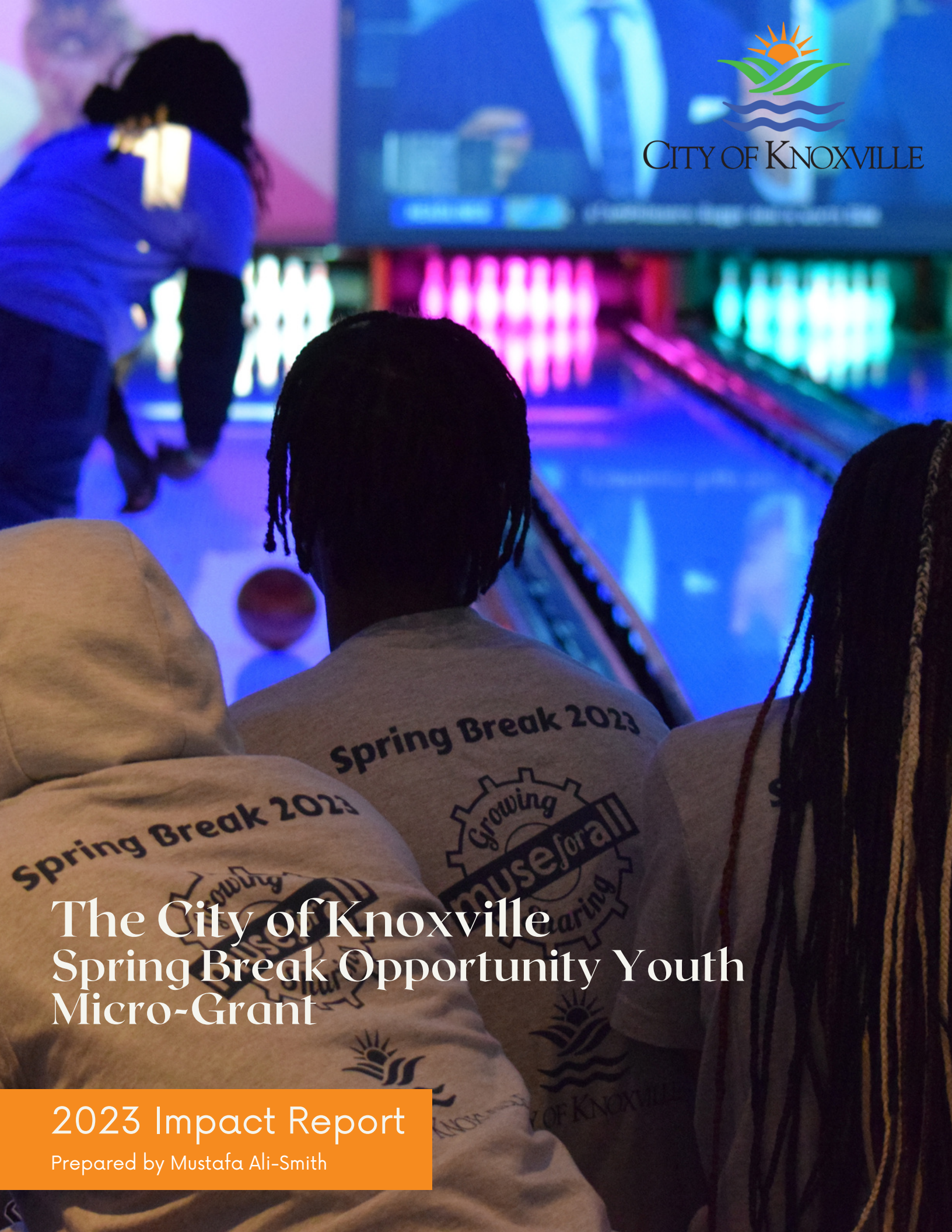




CITY OF KNOXVILLE



Spring Break 2023



Spring Break 2023

The City of Knoxville Spring Break Opportunity Youth Micro-Grant

2023 Impact Report

Prepared by Mustafa Ali-Smith

From the Director

For the second year, the City of Knoxville Office of Community Safety and Empowerment partnered with community-based organizations to serve youth through the Spring Break Opportunity Youth Micro-Grant. It's especially important for young people who have been engaged in violence -- as a victim or as someone who has caused harm -- to understand that they are connected to a supportive community that cares about their quality of life and future outcomes, and see their options beyond violence. These spring break opportunities also help youth build connections through jobs and activities that empower them to develop social and professional skills and tools that can help them make healthy decisions. This year's Spring Break Opportunity Youth Micro-Grant not only helped expand these opportunities to more young people in Knoxville, it also gave youth opportunities to try new experiences and have fun.

This year we saw a dramatic increase in the number of youth who participated in spring break programming: 237 youth participated, representing an almost 100 percent increase from last year. Programming included community service activities and job shadowing where students received stipends.

We are thankful for the families, volunteers, staff, and community organizations that came together to make this year's spring break programming a success.



LaKenya Middlebrook
Director, Office of Community Safety and
Empowerment



Introduction

Every person deserves an opportunity to live a life away from violence, and for many young people, engaging them whenever possible is a step in that direction. The City of Knoxville's Spring Break Opportunity Youth Grant (SBOYG) set out to engage teenagers in programming, job shadowing, temporary employment, or other engagement opportunities. The Office of Community Safety and Empowerment defines "Opportunity Youth" as young people who are specifically identified as being at the highest risk of involvement with violent crime. These young people² identified as being either a member of, or associated with, an active crew/group/gang; having juvenile or criminal system involvement; being disconnected from school, work or consistent participation in community-based programs/services; a violent crime victim; or having a close friend or family member who was shot in the last year.

Connecting young people to positive networks and engaging them in opportunities associated with personal, community and social development can begin the process of dismantling barriers to success, expanding perceptions of what is possible, focusing on community strengths and assets, and ultimately preventing violence in the community. The City of Knoxville recognizes that breaks in activities such as school and recreational programming provide opportunities to engage with Opportunity Youth and provide expanded experiences that may not be feasible during regular programming hours.

This year, the community organizations that received spring break funding created opportunities that serve as a first line of defense for Knoxville's Opportunity Youth. Opportunity Youth—primarily Black, brown, and low-income children—deserve the opportunity to safely play and have fun alongside other children as a means of preventing violence.



Participating Organizations

Drums Up Guns Down

Collaborating with the YWCA and the Edge Foundation, Drums Up Guns Down gives youth at highest risk of violence the chance to express themselves and heal through drumming and dance. Having a way to heal is important because, without healing, these students could cause more pain for someone else. This program provided participants with a space to be creative, show leadership skills, and learn a skill within the arts.

Florence Crittenton Agency

Florence Crittenton Agency (FCA) mission is to strengthen communities through effective prevention services for children and families. FCA operates a fully accredited one-site school, New Pathway Academy (on-campus school). With this grant, FCA provided new activities to students that are not feasible during regular school hours including art therapy and recreational games, program activities will last about four hours each day.

Turn Up Knox

Turn Up Knox strives to interrupt cycles of gun violence in the Knoxville area. Programming consisted of providing Opportunity Youth leadership training and mentoring, as well as participation in the organization's volunteer lawn care services at Crestview Cemetery. Participants received a stipend for their work. Through the lawn care work, students got to help beautify and maintain a historic cemetery established for Black residents in 1920.

Emerald Youth Foundation

Emerald Youth Foundation serves Opportunity Youth through their calling and career programming, which operates four centers for high school students and young adults. Located in East Knoxville, Mechanicsville, Lonsdale, and Oakwood/Lincoln Park, the centers engage youth in these neighborhoods affected by violence, where youth are more disconnected from community programs, at risk of falling behind academically, or have some involvement in the criminal system. Programming included academic support, access and exposure to post-secondary education and training, college tours, workshops for career planning, and physical and mental well-being.

Participating Organizations

Girl Talk

Girl Talk is a nonprofit organization that exists to empower girls to become their best selves by reducing the likelihood of teen pregnancy and helping them advance academically. Girl Talk provides youth a safe space to process trauma, therapy access, mentoring, life-prep skills, and college & career access and opportunities. For spring break programming, Girl Talk engaged Opportunity Youth in a 3-day, 2-night college tour to expose them to the benefits and opportunities of attending college.

My Daughter's Journey

My Daughter's Journey provides supportive services, resources and advocacy to young women ages 13-24. My Daughter's Journey gave Opportunity Youth the opportunity to intern and job shadow at Salvation Army. This experience allowed participants to see leaders at work and learn valuable work skills.

SEED Knox

SEED worked with local Austin-East and Fulton High schools to identify Opportunity Youth. Participating students made SMART goals, received one-on-one counseling, and were coached in soft skills, such as how to dress for different jobs, handshaking and personal presentation. Participants visited a solar house to learn about jobs in green construction and participated in community engagement projects such as focus groups, surveys and weatherization workshops.

YWCA

The YWCA identified Opportunity Youth formally through assessments and informally through relationship-central staffing strategies. Programming included providing internship opportunities to opportunity youth between ages 14-18 who would have not otherwise qualified for work skills programs traditionally offered to individuals with exceptional academic and service records. The internship offered guided service learning, hands-on work, and life skills, job- and work skills- shadowing, and participating in community service projects.

Participating Organizations

MUSE Knoxville

Muse Knoxville engaged Opportunity Youth through the power of play. Activities included a trip to Main Event for teens to bond with each other and enjoy recreation, making them more comfortable to share their life experiences. Students were given a planner/reflection journal, as well as information about empowerment-based programming such as The Muse Apprenticeship program, National Achievers Society, Battlefield Farms internships, and more.

Real Talk

Real Talk is a mentoring program that takes a comprehensive approach focusing on education and character development while also providing basic support items such as food and clothing, as needed. Students participated in two weeks of empowerment learning. Students were utilized as peer mentors as they worked alongside staff and students in the after-school program at the YWCA-Phyllis Wheatley Center. Students spent time with empowerment guests such as representatives from the University of Tennessee, Metro Drug Coalition and Knoxville Police Department. Students also worked cleaning up their local community park.



10

community organizations were awarded the Spring Break Opportunity Youth Micro-Grant in 2023

\$28,205.56

awarded to organizations



At a Glance

The spring break Opportunity Youth programs successfully achieved their goal of providing engagement activities, job opportunities, and professional development to Opportunity Youth teens throughout the Knoxville community. Selected organizations created unique opportunities for youth during the 2023 spring break when some might have otherwise been disconnected from support and community, as a result potentially turning to violence.

As the spring break programs ended, many participants transitioned to after-school programming or employment, either within or outside the organization they were engaged with. With the City of Knoxville's help, the programs created a bridge that picked up where school breaks left off, successfully supporting and engaging Opportunity Youth until they resumed the school year.

Spring Break 2023

- 10 community-based organizations received funding to provide spring break engagement opportunities for Opportunity Youth teenagers.
- Programming began on or about March 13, 2023, and closed by March 17, 2023.
- **237 youths were served** during the 2023 spring break.³
- 62% of participants were between the ages of 15-17 years old
- **Black/ African American youth made up 76% of participants.**⁴
- **144 of 237 youths reported Opportunity Youth status**, representing over half of participants. Of this number:
 - 16% reported gang/ crew/ or group affiliation
 - 25% reported having some juvenile or criminal system involvement
 - 60% reported being disconnected from school, work, or community organizations
 - 16% reported being a previous crime victim,
 - 8% reported having a close friend or family member shot in the last year.

Themes & Outcomes from Spring Break Programming



1

To prevent violence, Opportunity Youth disconnected from services and supports must be engaged.

Youth need opportunities for affordable engagement opportunities such as sports, participating in the arts, storytelling activities, music, and others. These opportunities not only provide youth a sense of belonging and a healthy distraction from their challenges, but help build a support network around them to steer them away from violence.

2

Opportunity Youth want the skills to do and be better.

Throughout the 2023 spring break programming, Opportunity Youth had opportunities to learn or enhance skills sometimes not offered in other settings. Many participants boasted about the opportunity to enhance or take up skills during spring break that they could carry with them, in school or future work, well after the programming concluded.

3

Services and programming cannot be temporary. Youth need ongoing support.

The 2023 spring break programming not only showcased why youth need to be supported with services and programming, but that the end of a school break should not mean the end of opportunities and support. Once the break concluded, youth participants segued into other programming and service opportunities or continued with the current supports.



237

Total Youth Served

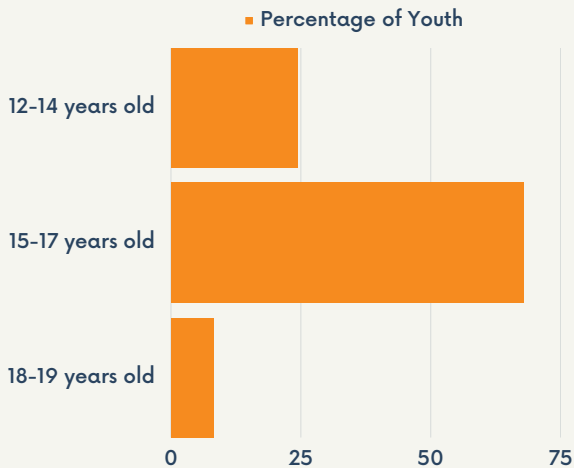
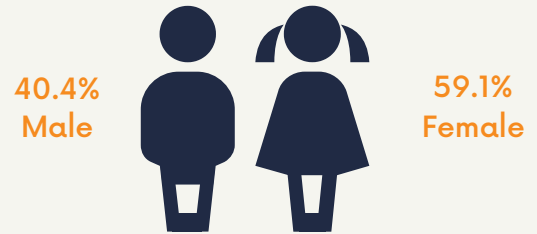
Among Spring Break Opportunity Youth Teen Programming



Spring Break Program Demographics

Gender

Spring Break Opportunity Youth Grant (SBOYG) programs sought to be gender inclusive.

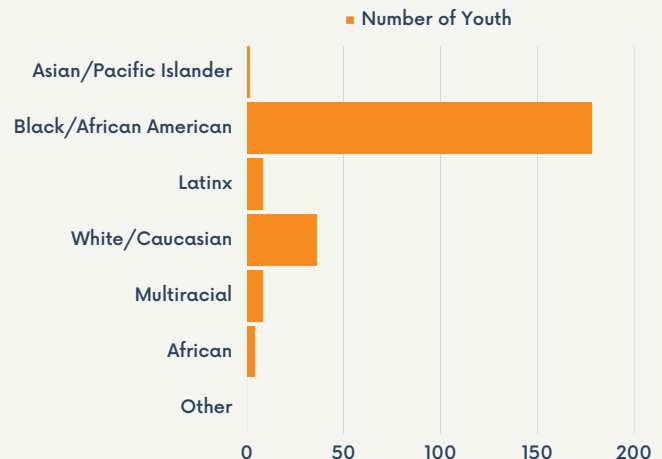


Age

Over half of SBOYG program participants (67.8%) were between 15 and 17 years of age.⁵ Programs served youth ages 12 - 19.

Race/Ethnicity

Over 75% of SBOYG program participants were Black/African American.



Where Do Participants Live?

Understanding Geographics

Over half of 2023 spring break program participants came from zip codes 37914, 37915, and 37917, spanning East and Northwest Knoxville. ⁶

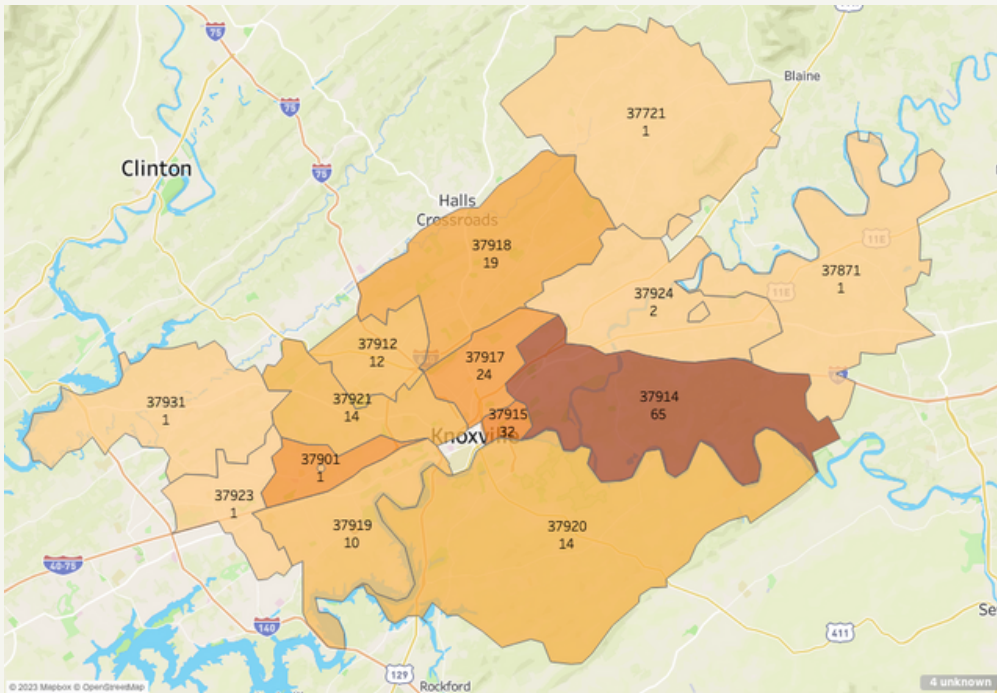


Image Description: Map of Knoxville, TN color coded by ZIP code including the total number of participants from each ZIP code.

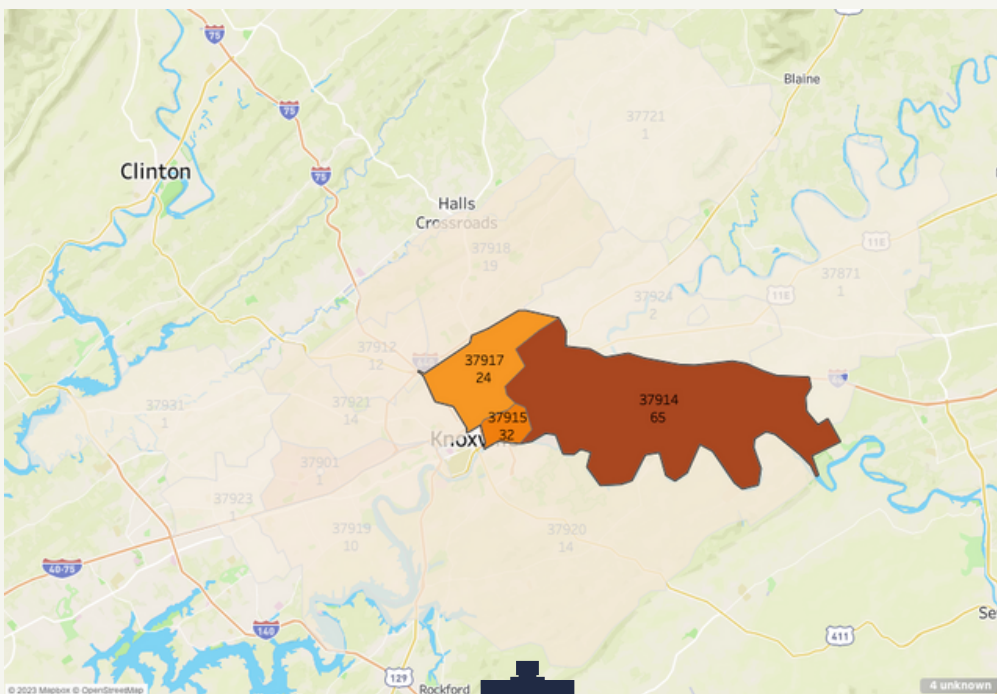


Image Description: Map of Knoxville, TN highlighting ZIP codes by color with the largest number of program participants.



Geography & Violence

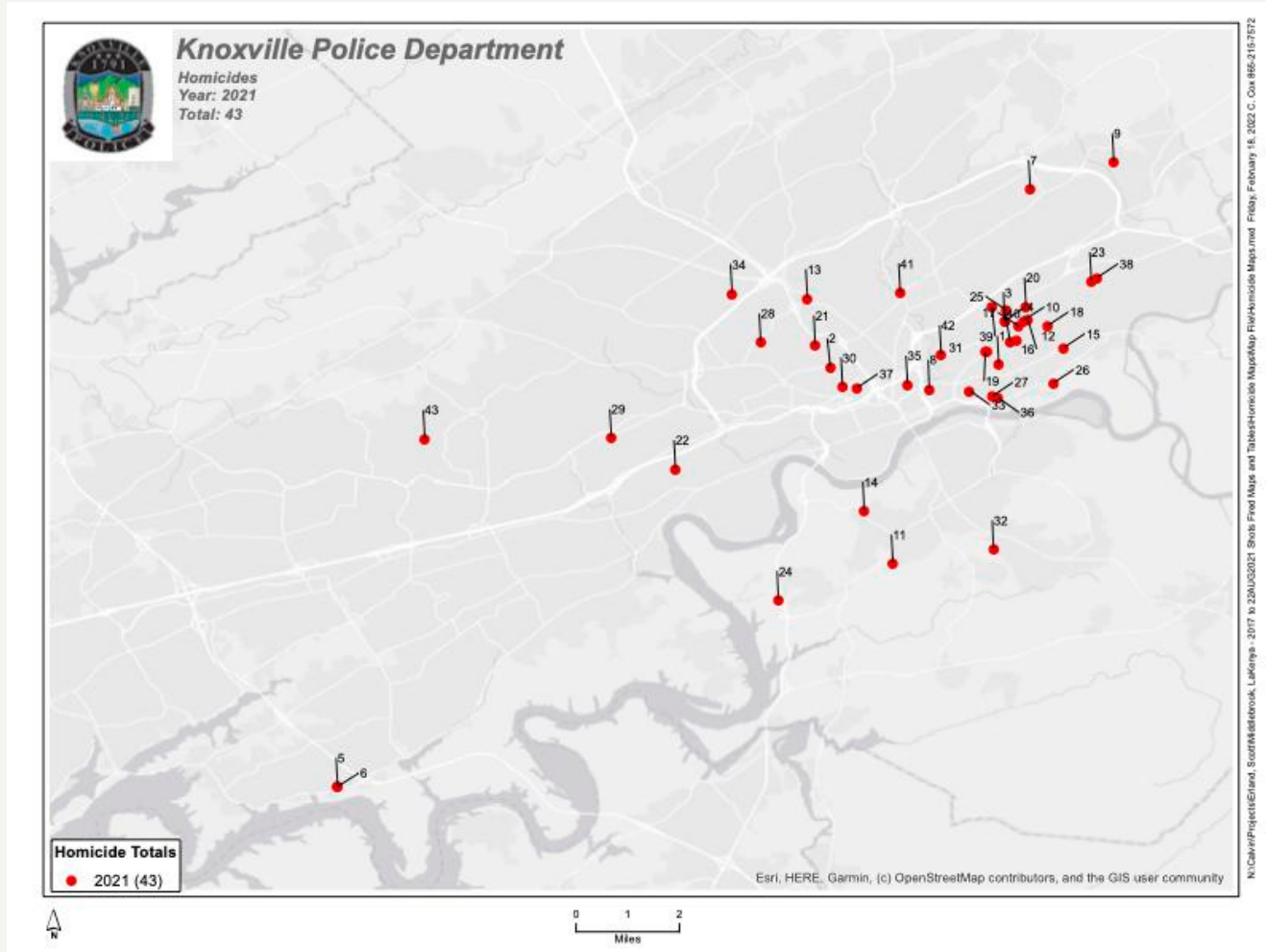


Image Description:

Map of Knoxville, TN highlighting representing homicides during the year 2022.

Annually, Knoxville Police Department (KPD) reports the number of homicides and their locations. In 2021, there were 43 total homicides reported, with the majority occurring throughout the East Knoxville area. This area has had increasingly more homicides over the years.⁷ In alignment with the goals of the Opportunity Youth Micro-Grant, youth living in these highest risk areas were provided opportunities for engagement or employment to shift them away from violence.



16%

Gang/ crew/
group affiliated

25%

Juvenile or criminal
system involvement

59.7%

Disconnected from
school, work, or
community group

16%

Previous crime
victim

37.5%

Close friend or
family member shot
in the last year

Connecting with Opportunity Youth



“ Just to see and hear young black males share their stories about how they’ve been affected by violence, their experience with therapy, and what they go through on a daily basis was very informative and eye opening for all of us. — **Drums Up Guns Down** ”

One of the primary goals of the SBOYG was to provide engagement opportunities for Opportunity Youth teens throughout the Knoxville. Programming provided through the grant aimed to reach youths with a proven risk of violence -- often those experiencing poverty -- and offer paid opportunities through youth-serving organizations already working in communities.

Data from the 2023 SBOYG shows that 60% of participants reported be an Opportunity Youth. Additionally, over half of reported participants identified with being disconnected from school, work or community groups in Knoxville. These youth have crossover among other Opportunity Youth identifiers. For example, over a quarter of reported participants also noted having previous justice system contact or a close friend or family member who had been shot within the past year.

As youth who may have some connection to violence, whether directly or indirectly, SBOYG programming showcased that engaging these youth was successful.

Poverty and Violence

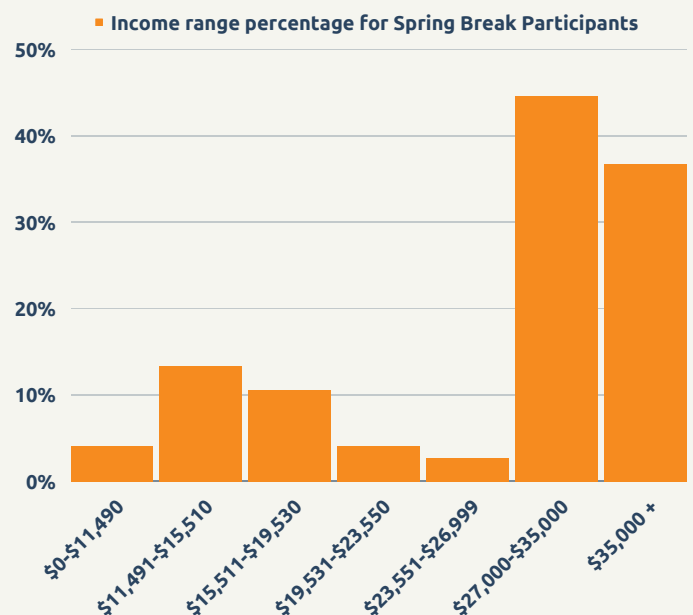
The City of Knoxville recognizes that **violence is one of the symptoms of poverty, not a cause.**

While the median income for Tennessee residents is \$58,516, it is \$44,308 for Knoxville residents, indicating that Knoxville residents are much closer to the poverty line than other Tennesseans.⁸ Knoxville has the highest overall poverty rate of all major Tennessee cities at 25% and one of the highest proportions of Black/African-American poverty across all major Southeastern cities.



Poverty is linked to community-based violence, and in Knoxville, violence is disproportionately concentrated in areas with high concentrations of black or poor residents.

Violence in Knoxville is disproportionately concentrated in areas with high numbers of Black or poor residents. For the 2023 spring break programming, over half of reported participants came from households that had an income below \$35,000, which is much lower than the median income of Knoxville residents and all Tennesseans.⁹ Of those reported, most participants noted having between 2-5 other individuals living within the home, with the highest reported number being 10.



Creating Job Opportunities

Although many spring break families came from low-income neighborhoods and families, programming offered youth opportunities to develop skills and income instead of change out of their circumstance. Some programming offered participants temporary work while also providing them with a stipend for their time and effort.



“ Turn Up Knox had two cousins who participated in the spring break program. At ages 14 and 16, these young men have been growing up in a single-parent home with their mother/aunt who has been struggling financially. After spending the week learning leadership skills, the cousins decided to use their wages made during spring break to form their own LLC business to help provide landscaping and yard maintenance to community members — **Turn Up Knox** ”

“ Students really enjoyed the service project opportunities. One student was incredibly excited about using tools for the first time. Another participant was in his element and loved to show off his skills and knowledge to his friends. This student took on a leadership role during the day that he had never stepped into before. A third student impressed our team so much we offered him an internship for the summer. — **Emerald Youth Foundation** ”

Skills Learned



Spring break programs provided youth participants with several skills and engagement opportunities. These skills are critical for our youth to learn, several of which helped prepare them for future jobs and careers.

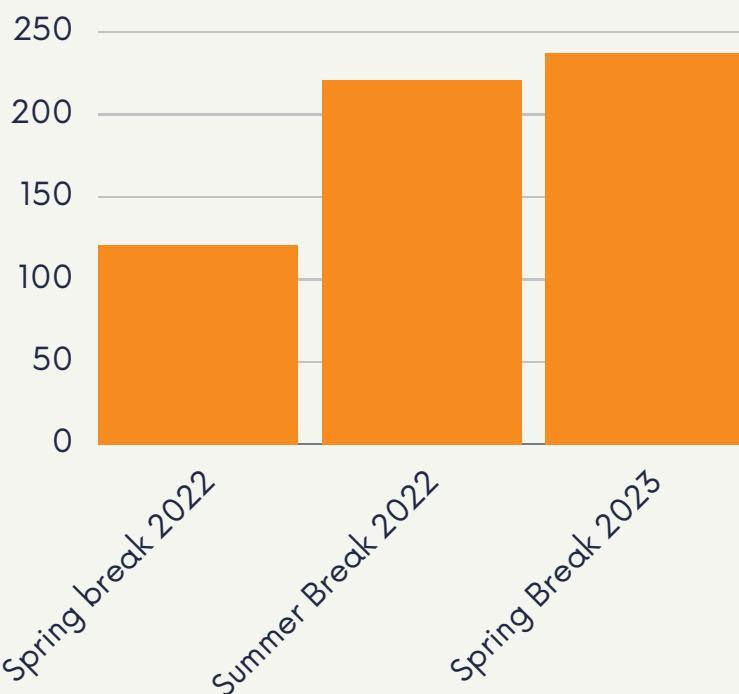


“Today, we all played multiple games with underlying meanings that help us all become leaders. We did small group activities to give each of us an experience of teamwork. During one of the exercises, I gained the skill of patience. I had to learn to be patient with others while team-building. Overall, a fun training. — YWCA Spring Break participant”

Continuing Engagement Efforts

Knoxville must be committed to engaging Opportunity Youth whenever possible. Over the last two years, more Opportunity Youth have taken up programming and service opportunities offered through local community-based organizations. As the City of Knoxville continues to support these organizations and programs, we hope that the numbers of participating youth continue to increase.

HOW HAS SPRING BREAK PROGRAMMING GROWN?



Youth living in predominately Black or African American communities experiencing high levels of poverty and crime need policies and programs designed for their unique history and experiences. To combat violence in the Knoxville community, continued programming for youth during critical school breaks (fall break, spring break, and summer) offer some of the best times to engage youth. However, these should not be the only opportunities for our youth to be engaged. Youth, particularly Opportunity Youth, are looking for opportunities to be engaged. Youth were able to transition to after-school programming or employment with the organizations they were engaged with. This transition reaffirmed that youth benefitted from programs that served as a bridge to resources, professional development opportunities, engagement activities, and job opportunities.

References

1. For the City of Knoxville's 2022 Spring Break and Summer impact report, see https://cdnsm5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_109478/File/CommunitySafety/2022-SB-SOYG-Impact-Report.pdf
2. Youth.gov defines Opportunity Youth as young people who are between the ages of 16 to 24 years old and are disconnected from school and work. This developmental time period, also referred to as emerging adulthood, has great potential for individual growth through exploring independence and life opportunities. It is a critical window of opportunity for youth and young adults to gain an education and/or training that would "...provide the foundation for their occupational trajectories during the rest of their adulthood." This can include developing knowledge, skills, and character traits that are important for opportunity youth's career pathway development.
3. 237 reflects the number of submitted anonymous surveys received from youth participants. However, the actual number of participants could be higher.
4. Not all participants reported their race and ethnicity. This percentage accounts for data on 235 responses.
5. Not all participants reported gender. This percentage accounts for data on 230 responses.
6. The percentage of highest number of participants from different ZIP codes throughout Knoxville accounts for responses from 230 participants
7. Crime analyst unit, <https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/cms/One.aspx?portalId=109562&pageId=192584>.
8. Poverty and Violence. Robert D. Crutchfield and Tim Wadsworth. International Handbook of Violence Research, 2003. See also 2020 Knoxville-Knox County Community Needs Assessment. University of Tennessee College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service, 2020.
9. For income levels, only 38 participants of all 237 reported back.



CITY OF KNOXVILLE