



Luis Guerrero

South Sacramento Building Health Communities (BHC) Resident Profile

In 2010, The California Endowment (TCE) launched the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, a 10-year, \$1 billion program to improve the health of 14 challenged communities in California. The South Sacramento area is one of the 14 communities where residents, community-based organizations, local government, and public institutions collaborate to reverse the socioeconomic, environmental and systems challenges that contribute to health inequalities in their community. TCE's Sons & Brothers 7-year, \$50 million dollar initiative was part of the BHC and focused on providing opportunities for young people of color, particularly young men, to help them reach their full potential.

Luis Guerrero, 27, was raised in the South Sacramento Building Healthy Communities (BHC) area. After graduating from high school, he went on to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) and is currently enrolled in the CSUS teaching credential program. Luis earns a living as a Sound Engineer, and DJ. He is actively involved in the South Sacramento BHC through the boys and men of color (BMoC) work, specifically in his role as the Lead Youth Facilitator. He supports youth in planning, coordinating and implementing the annual BMoC summit, which provides an opportunity for young men of color to learn about, and become empowered to change the critical issues that impact their lives directly.

Luis's involvement with the BMoC and BHC **changed his narrative** of the systems of oppression affecting boys and men of color, and allowed him to see the power and necessity of **youth leadership**. BHC was a catalyst to Luis becoming an **engaged resident**, and ultimately led him to change his career trajectory to positively impact the lives of youth of color.

His Path to the BHC

Luis's path to civic engagement started at a young age when he and his family would regularly volunteer with their church. While attending CSUS, Luis learned that high school boys of color have the highest failure rate in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes. Due to the low number of students of color entering STEM fields, he and a colleague started a math and science tutoring program at Health Professions High School that attracted young men of color.

Through a referral from a nonprofit organization, Luis became involved with the BMoC work by planning, and DJing at, the first annual summit. After showing dedication to the BMoC work and an ability to mentor young men of color, South Sacramento BHC Hub staff recruited Luis to be a South Sacramento BHC Steering Committee member, and the Lead Youth Facilitator and Co-Coordinator of the annual BMoC summit, the latter role he has continued for the past six years.

In his role as Lead Youth Facilitator, Luis helps youth plan the annual BMoC summit. According to Luis, he has a natural ability to connect with youth, in part because of sharing similar lived experiences with the young people in the program.

“ When I see this work and I see the students, I see myself. I used to be in [their] shoes. It is very easy for me to do this work because I was that student. ”



Luis's mentoring approach begins with asking youth to identify one or two issues that are salient to their everyday experience and using these issues as workshop topics for the annual summit. By learning about and talking through the issues in preparation for planning and facilitating the summit, the youth build skills and become empowered change agents. When discussing his strategy for empowering youth, Luis relayed:

“[Empowerment] allows the young men to take a leadership role in discussing critical issues that affect them more personally. It allows them to talk about social issues that they do not get to talk about in classrooms and families... to identify social ills and be advocates for change.”

BHC as a Catalyst of Change

“ If you would have asked me what I wanted to do in life, back then (pre-BHC), I would say I wanted to be an electrical engineer. But now, I would say,
I want to end the school-to-prison pipeline. ”

While Luis was having a positive impact on the boys and men of color he mentored, the BMoC work was also having an impact on him. Specifically, Luis’s involvement in the BMoC helped him see how the issues affecting boys and men of color are shaped by larger systems, in contrast to being exclusively related to individual experience.

“Before, I saw [BMoC] disparities in isolation. I was not attaching it to this larger systemic issue ... being involved in BMoC work let me see beyond the issue, beyond my little square box. It allowed me to see [that] it is not just institutions, it is everywhere...”

The BMoC work led to Luis **changing his narrative** about the systematic oppression of people of color rather than being fed a narrative that benefits the system. Luis stated, “you can have narrative change, or you can be given narrative, and that is how it was for me.”

Through mentoring youth for the past six years, Luis also came to realize the power and necessity of **youth leadership** in systems change work:

“The whole idea behind BMoC work: [youth] are the future, but [BMoC youth] are the future that is being mostly incarcerated, that is being left behind. So, reinvesting in youth has to be at the center of changing these systems. Huey Newton says, ‘the young shall inherit the revolution’ – it is future driven work, so it is revolutionary work, so it is youth work. I did not realize youth could have such an impact. I did not realize their influence. It has politicized me, it made me literally question my career path.”

Through Luis’s process of becoming “socially and politically awakened,” he decided to **change his career path** from engineering to education. Luis contemplated whether he could continue his work with boys and men of color in a transformational way, while remaining in the engineering field. The decision to change his career path from engineering to teaching was not easy, and he contemplated the decision for three years because, “in a capitalist society ... it is all about money ... it is hard to recondition yourself to go from money to purpose.” Luis decided to enroll in the teaching credential program at CSUS to become a high school math teacher. Eventually, Luis plans to become a college professor to instruct teachers how to engage youth in a culturally competent way to address the underrepresentation of boys and men of color in the STEM field, and to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Luis shared how BMoC has changed him,

“I am definitely more politically engaged because of the BMoC work in Sacramento and throughout the state ... without BMoC, I do not think I would be as civically engaged as I am now ... being involved in the BMoC work has politicized me, it has opened me up to the politics behind certain issues [and] behind systems change ... it definitely shaped me and how I view my life and what I want to do with my life.”