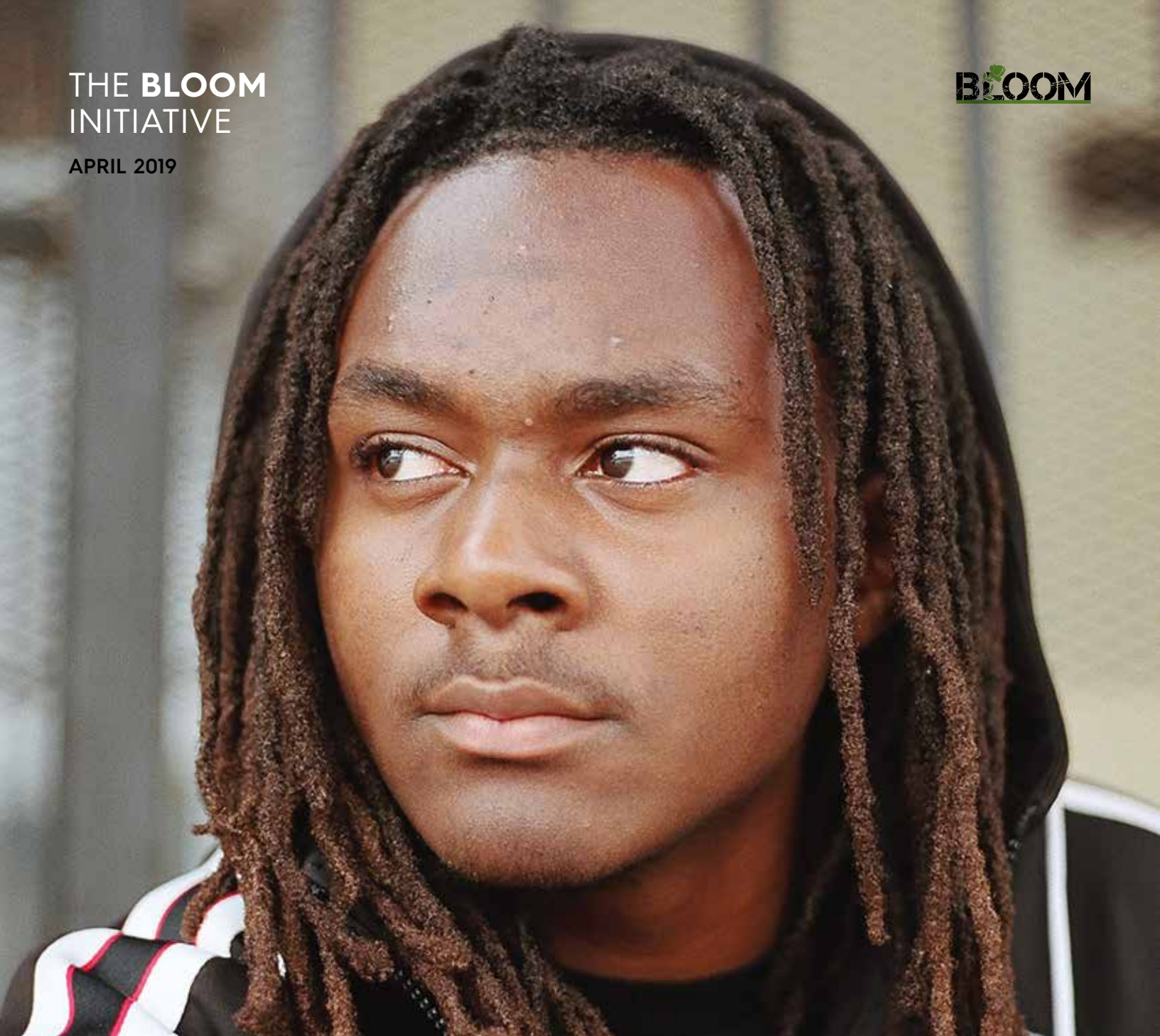


THE BLOOM  
INITIATIVE

APRIL 2019

BLOOM



# Building a Lifetime of Options and Opportunities for Men:

Transforming the Lives of Young  
Black Men in South Los Angeles

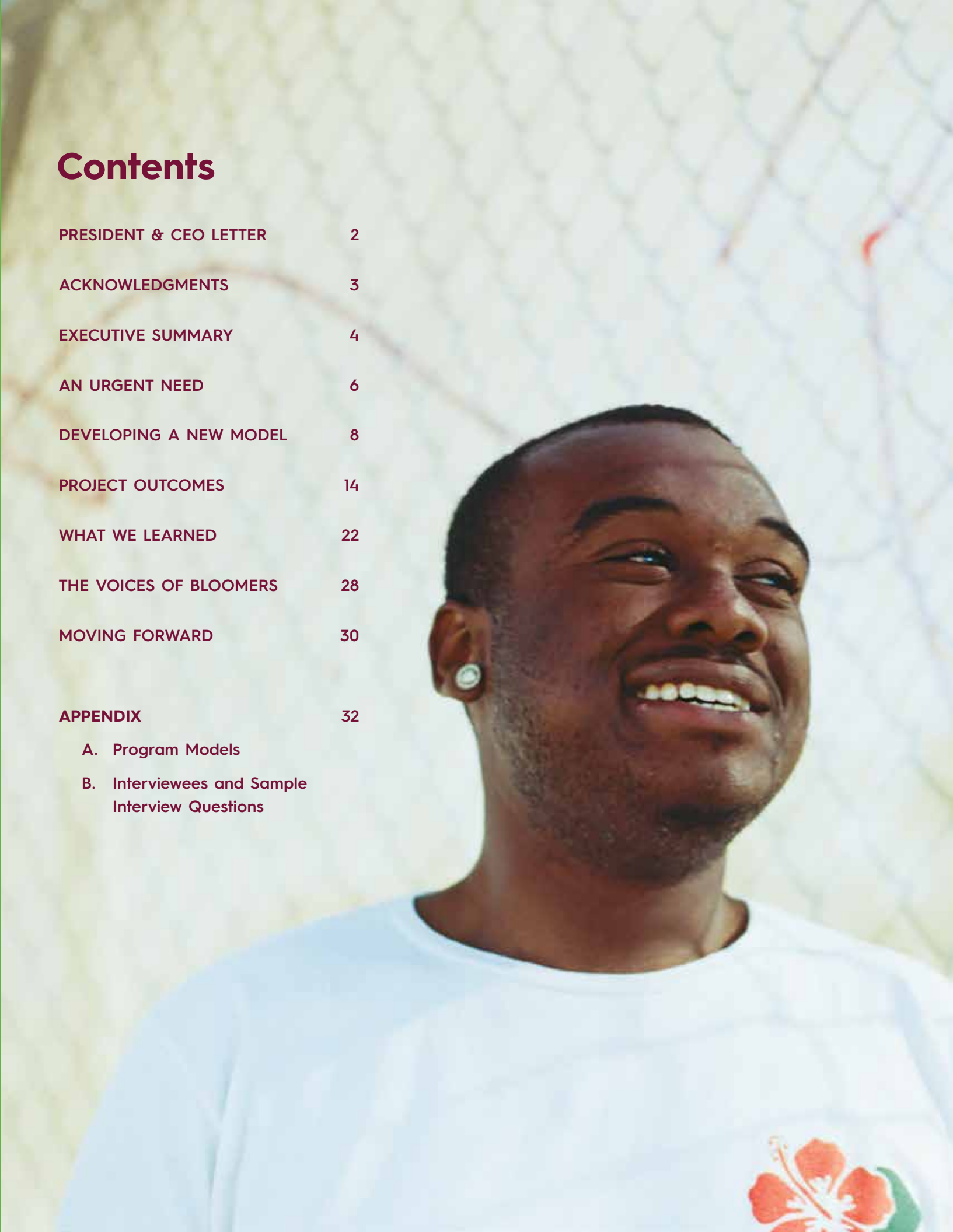


California  
**COMMUNITY**  
Foundation



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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

As community leaders, we encourage young people to work hard, be patient, take smart risks, and to be lifelong learners. But how often do we truly live that advice ourselves?

In 2012, CCF launched BLOOM, a \$7 million initiative to address the overwhelming disparities faced by Black male youth involved in L.A. County’s juvenile justice system. Over seven years, the initiative has blossomed, with **Brotherhood Crusade (BHC)** and **Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI)** delivering programs that uncover the true potential of Black boys and young men. Though the initiative was not without its challenges, our partners worked hard, were patient, took smart risks, and committed themselves to learning along the way. The result is a powerful new model for expanding opportunities for young people who face steep and entrenched barriers.

As I reflect on this process, I am reminded of President Obama’s words at the 2018 Obama Foundation Summit, “One of the mistakes all young organizers make—certainly I did when I was young—is to think that societies will change on our timetable. While we should be impatient about injustice—while we should seek to challenge it at every opportunity—the truth is that creating lasting change takes time. It takes effort. And most importantly, it takes listening to our families, our neighbors, and our friends.”

When you’re working with young people whose lives are as precarious as BLOOM participants are, patience can be difficult to find. Their windows for getting back on track close so quickly, and so often a few mistakes in childhood will set the paths for the rest of their lives. Still, we must find a way to be patient, because the impulse to jump from trend to trend without gathering all the evidence is one of the biggest reasons why we continue to struggle to give young men the support they need.

We found that patience by listening to our partners and to BLOOM participants. They made clear that tinkering around the edges wouldn’t be enough. This was CCF’s first effort focused on the juvenile justice population, so we had no choice but to listen to our partners and to the people affected by the work. In retrospect, I am grateful that we came into the initiative with minimal experience, because it freed us to listen and learn humbly, without preconceptions.

I hope you’ll spend a bit of time with this report and consider what it has to teach all us about how best to serve our communities. Nearly every major indicator of economic, social, and physical well-being shows that Black men and boys in the U.S. are systematically deprived of the support and opportunities they need to thrive, and when they fail to achieve their potential, we all suffer. I believe that BLOOM can help our field move beyond traditional anti-recidivism and diversion work—work that addresses only the symptoms of the chronic underinvestment in these boys and young men—and toward holistic interventions that help young men graduate from high school, complete post-secondary programs, and prepare for the workforce. If our work inspires you to reimagine what is possible for these boys and young men, then the patience will have been well worth it.

The BLOOM model certainly can’t address every barrier they face, but I believe it shows us a path forward, so we can stop thinking of our young men as “problems” to be “fixed,” and instead see them as valuable members of our community with essential contributions to make.

Sincerely,  
Antonia Hernández  
President and CEO, California Community Foundation

# Acknowledgements

The California Community Foundation (CCF) expresses deep gratitude to our funders, donors, and advisors for their guidance, encouragement, and feedback on this initiative. Together, we have dreamed big and acted boldly to improve the lives of our youth and our community’s future. CCF would like to extend a special thanks to the key Building a Lifetime of Options and Opportunities for Men (BLOOM) nonprofit partners, Brotherhood Crusade and Social Justice Learning Institute, as well as to members of the Advisory Committee. Most importantly, we would like to acknowledge the youth who are served by BLOOM. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your growth.

## Foundation Partners

- Citi Foundation – Community Progress Makers
- Weingart Foundation
- Annenberg Foundation
- Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation
- California Wellness Foundation
- The Carl and Roberta Deutsch Foundation
- Union Bank Foundation

## Lead Donors

- Erika J. Glazer
- The Hanley Foundation
- Patricia Neuwirth

## Current Advisory Committee Members:

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- Carol Biondi
- David Crippens
- Karim Webb
- Dr. Manuel Pastor
- Mark Loranger
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- Dr. Terrence Roberts
- Virgil Roberts
- Zaid Gayle
- Zakeer Willis

## Previous Advisory Committee Members:

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- Courtney Lyder
- Dr. Hershel Swinger
- Marqueece Harris-Dawson
- Montae Langston
- Reggie Webb
- Dr. Renford Reese
- Towalame Austin
- Trayvon Walker
- Dr. Tyrone Howard
- Vincent Jones
- Dr. Winston Doby
- Yusef Omowale

## Current and Previous CCF BLOOM Staff:

- Nike Irvin
- Tammy Johnson
- Kelly King
- Robert Lewis
- Kristina McGee
- Alvertha Penny
- Jai Phillips  
(current BLOOM Program Manager)
- LaWayne Williams

# Executive Summary



This report tells the story of BLOOM, its impact, and the lessons we learned along the way. Through the initiative, BHC and SJLI developed programs that tap into the potential of young Black males through developmental relationships with male mentors along with positive peer relationships and accountability with other young Black men. Since its launch, BLOOM has impacted the lives of nearly 800 young Black men in South L.A. Over the past six years, CCF's commitment of \$500,000 per year, totaling \$3.5 million, leveraged \$3.3 million from other foundations, as well as contributions from individual donors, with an additional \$3.2 million pledged over the next five years.

In achieving these outcomes, we learned several key lessons:

- **Big Change Takes Big Commitments:** It took CCF four years to find partners who were well-positioned to take the lead on this initiative, both because we were still sharpening our own priorities for the work and because the initial grants we offered were too small for the scope of change needed. We would encourage others to be realistic and up front about just how big an undertaking this type of change is and to structure their work accordingly.
- **Empower Your Community:** We believe foundations should not lead by themselves, but rather should enable the success of those who are closest to the community. By setting up a BLOOM Advisory Committee, we were able to engage funding partners, community leaders, grantees, and public agencies such as probation departments and school districts early and give them a meaningful stake in BLOOM.
- **Commit for the Long Term:** Though BLOOM was a pilot, the excitement around working with this population left some stakeholders wanting to scale up the initiative before fully defining and validating the program model. To give BLOOM an opportunity to achieve its full impact, we had to simultaneously resist this urge and also shift our own staffing to ensure the initiative was given its due attention.

## Key Outcomes

- **788** young men have participated in BLOOM since 2012
  - **92.7%** of BLOOMers tracked through senior year earned their high school diploma or GED
  - **69.5%** maintained a GPA of 2.01 or higher in 2017 and 2018
  - **69.7%** of the active BLOOMers met A-G requirements by the end of 12th grade in 2017 and 2018
  - **89.8%** upheld the terms of their probation and did not reoffend in 2017
  - **50%** decrease in suspension and expulsion among enrolled BLOOMers
- **Build Capacity and Infrastructure:** Community organizations know the landscape and the population, but they may not have the infrastructure and the resources to implement what needs to be done. Partners told us one of our most effective contributions was bringing in UCLA's Black Male Institute and Luskin School of Public Affairs to ensure evaluation measures were well designed and would allow them to compete for future public funding.
  - **Align Program and Evaluation Methods:** To build an evidence-based model that can be replicated, evaluators must engage organizations early in the process of articulating and refining goals, metrics, and outcomes. One major challenge we faced was a disconnect between the program evaluators and the grantees' internal evaluation staff. With the benefit of hindsight, we would have managed this proactively.
  - **Cultivate Trust Between Donors, Grantees, and the Community:** Creating more opportunities for youth to engage directly with donors is often the most powerful and compelling way to garner donor support. However, if these opportunities are not carefully structured, we risk objectifying marginalized communities or wasting partners' time and resources. One of the most powerful elements of the initiative was our July 2018 event, "A Midsummer Night in BLOOM," which brought together more than 150 donors, community members, elected officials, nonprofits, and foundations to hear the stories of young Black men and boys. BLOOMers sat with guests and engaged in meaningful conversations, with key policymakers like the mayor, county supervisors, and councilmembers serving South L.A.





# an urgent need

“True vision sees not what you are,  
but what you can be.” –BLOOM Advisory  
Committee Member

The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately impacts communities of color. Punitive policies and practices within public school districts and the juvenile justice system have stunted the potential of too many young Black men across Los Angeles and the country.

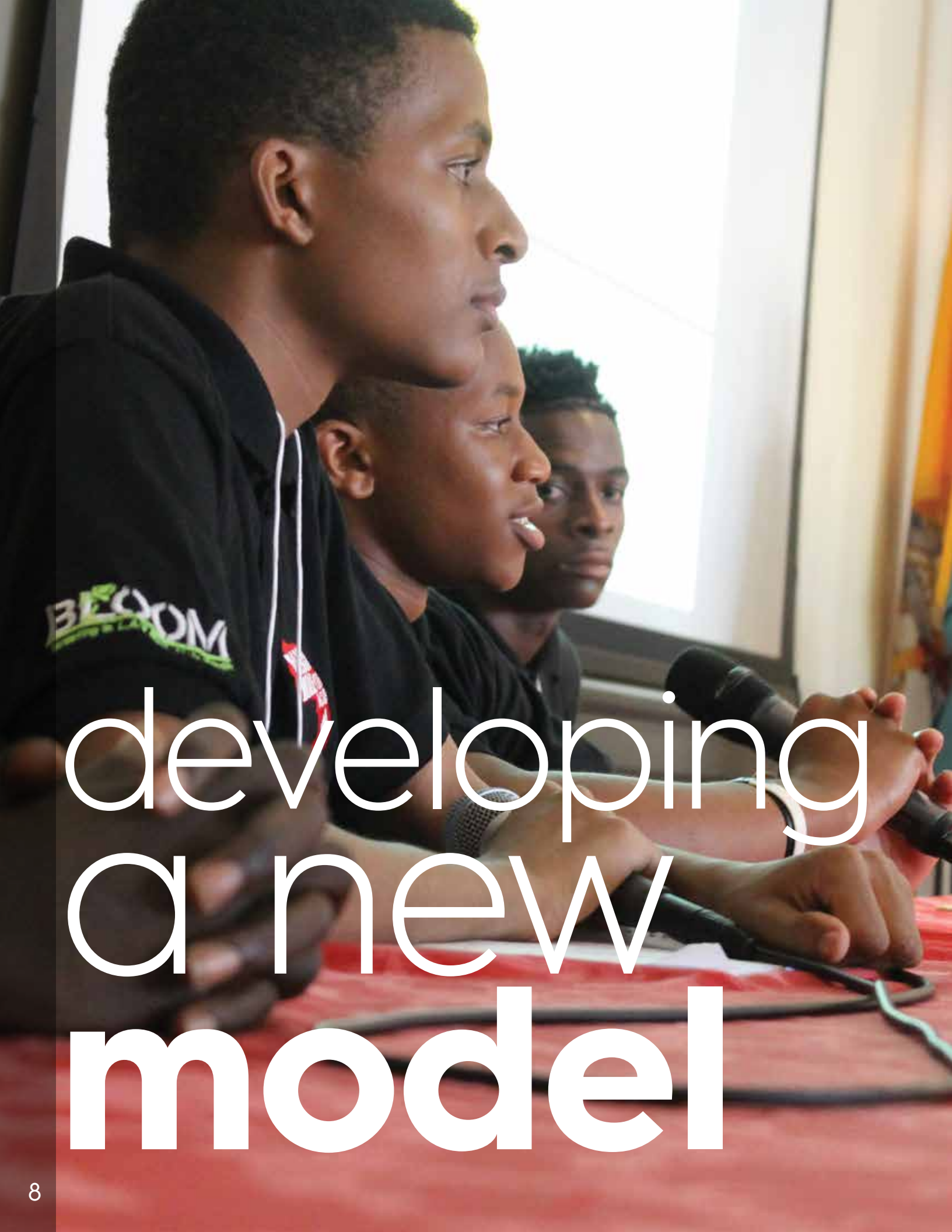
Although they make up only 9% of youth living in Los Angeles County, Black males account for 32% of all youth on probation.<sup>1</sup> This staggering statistic is made direr by the fact that 80% are re-arrested within three years. We know that education is a huge part of changing the trajectory of the lives of these young men, and specifically obtaining a high school diploma reduces their chance of incarceration by 87%,<sup>2</sup> but Black males in California have only a 60% high school graduation rate. In California, if a Black male doesn't graduate from high school, he has a 90% chance of being incarcerated by the age of 35.

Both initial contact and continued involvement with the justice system are associated with the increased likelihood of dropping out of high school, trauma, substance abuse, and other outcomes that negatively impact a young person's lifetime health and success. Formerly incarcerated persons earn lower wages because they face occupational restrictions, encounter discrimination in the hiring process, and have weaker social networks and less human capital due to their incarceration. The formerly incarcerated also have a mortality rate 3.5 times higher than that of people who have never been incarcerated. Their shortened life spans collectively add an economic toll of almost \$63 billion to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

According to the California Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), an estimated \$271,318 is spent per incarcerated youth. By comparison, the average cost of serving one BLOOMer annually is \$9,000. The true cost, though, is more than the additional \$262,318 per year. When we condemn a population of future innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders, we ensure that they'll likely never use their talents and dedication to solve Los Angeles County's shared challenges.

To date, most interventions have treated education and incarceration as separate issues, but BLOOM sees them as deeply linked. If we can address incarceration rates through the lens of educational attainment and link these efforts to wraparound support that addresses the childhood trauma faced by boys and young men growing up in poverty, then we give them a real chance to leverage their skills and contribute to their communities.





# developing a new model

"I'm proud of making it through high school and of having the opportunity to travel to Sacramento to advocate for bills that address problems impacting my community." –BLOOMer, age 19

BLOOM is designed to create a new sense of possibility for Black boys and young men, particularly those who are vulnerable to being caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline. Rather than treating education, career, identity, social bonds, and interactions with the criminal justice system distinctly, it offers a continuum of interventions focused on a positive future.

At the start of BLOOM, the target age for participants was defined as 14-18 years old. Over time the focus of the program expanded to include students as young as 12 and extend formal services post-high-school completion in support of the postsecondary and/or career development of older BLOOMers, further expanding the service population to age 24.

## **BLOOM serves Black males who fit one or more of the following criteria:**

- Probation-involved
- Reported behavioral issues
- School-credit deficient
- Chronic absenteeism or truancy

## **BHC and SJLI each developed program components that help BLOOMers:**

- Find meaning, hope, and self-efficacy
- Cultivate a sense of purpose
- Self-regulate behavior and emotions
- Create identity and belonging
- Develop emotional attachments to peers and family
- Nurture vulnerability and empathy

# Social Justice Learning Institute Program Model

Launched in 2008, SJLI helps individuals build their capacity to assess injustices while drawing upon their own agency to advocate for educational and health equity.

SJLI’s Black Male Youth Academy (BMYA) enrolls Black males in grades 9-12 to “explore topics such as Black male identity, African American history, and the Black diaspora” and has targeted probation-involved Black male youth as part of its involvement in the BLOOM initiative. Youth enrolled in BLOOM work intensively on positive self-identity and aspiration development while receiving academic and college assistance, employment training, and other necessary resources.

## BMYA programming for BLOOM youth includes:

- Educational field trips
- Academic and career counseling
- Life coaching
- Brotherhood activities
- Tutoring
- Leadership development
- Socio-emotional supports

# Brotherhood Crusade Program Model

Brotherhood Crusade was founded in 1968 to enrich the lives of at-risk youth, seniors, homeless populations, economically disadvantaged families, and underserved individuals in South L.A.

The programming offered as part of the BLOOM initiative through Brotherhood Crusade aims to reduce juvenile recidivism and promote academic advancement through a strengths-based approach that focuses on cultural awareness activities, guided self-discovery, vocational training and job placement, and economic empowerment. Activities include:

- Leadership and career-based mentoring
- Academic support and tutoring
- College and career readiness
- Job placement
- Peer bonding opportunities through events and sports
- Life skills
- Activities based in history and culture

# Life Course Model

In 2016, Forward Change Consulting joined BLOOM and proposed critical changes to the initiative, narrowing its focus and creating more measurable outcomes. They worked with the Advisory Committee and later CCF’s Board to strengthen how BLOOM would work with partners, including creating structures so that partners could:

- Agree on desired outcomes and what shifts were needed to get there.
- Change the service population from 14-18-year olds to 12-18-year olds to prevent early probation involvement.
- Include non-justice-system-involved youth who have high need (chronically absent, credit deficient, or with behavioral problems).
- Determine which aspects of the program could be replicable and scalable.

## CCF’s Role

CCF’s role in implementing the BLOOM initiative included: research and design, convening, grantmaking, fundraising support, capacity-building, communications, and commissioning evaluations to determine progress and impact. Key participants included:

- A volunteer Advisory Committee comprised of community, business, and civic leaders who shared their knowledge, experience, and access to other resources and served as a brain trust, advocate and steward of BLOOM.
- A cross-departmental staff team led by program staff and including staff from the Foundation’s development and communications departments.
- Grantee partners whose work with the BLOOMer population was central to achieving the goals of the initiative.
- A team of consultants to provide technical assistance to both CCF and its grantee partners throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of the initiative.
- Partnerships with other foundations and individual donors who were willing to join CCF in learning how to best support the grantee partners and BLOOMers.
- A relationship with the Los Angeles Probation Department and local school districts, including LAUSD, Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), and Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD), stewarded by community partners.

Because we were committed to fundamentally rethinking the service model offered to Black boys and young men, we engaged in a lengthy and thorough process of developing and implementing the BLOOM initiative. Though this process was not always smooth, we believe that the outcomes show the time and resources invested were well worth it.

# BLOOM TIMELINE

## 2009

Alvertha Penny, then VP of Programs at CCF, advocated for a greater focus on reducing disparities in the lives of Black men and boys in L.A. Within months, CCF had commissioned RAND Corporation to conduct research on their needs.

## 2011

CCF officially launches BLOOM with an initial 5-year \$2.5 million investment and a goal of raising an additional \$2.5 million.

## 2012

CCF releases the initial requests for proposals for BLOOM, and nine organizations are funded.

UCLA begins annual evaluations of BLOOM.

## 2013

BLOOM gains momentum during a White House listening tour in response to the police shootings of unarmed Black men.

After the first donor fundraising event, BLOOM begins to gain traction among other funders, donors, and stakeholders.

## 2014

President Obama launches My Brother's Keeper (MBK), and a set of national and local funder alliances begin to collaborate. This ecosystem helped BLOOM gain attention and allies, including significant donors.

## 2015

Los Angeles County joined the MBK Challenge. To date, the County's MBK Initiative has birthed the following efforts: Youth Diversion & Development (YDD), the County Employee Mentoring Program, and the County Career Exposure Program.

BHC and SJLI demonstrated that their programs most closely aligned with a newly-narrowed focus on comprehensive youth development services geared towards

high-school completion and reducing recidivism. SJLI and BHC also began building relationships with the L.A. County Probation Department, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and the Inglewood Unified School District (IUSD). As a result, they became the exclusive BLOOM delivery partners.

## 2016

Forward Change Consulting is brought on to achieve greater program fidelity and to integrate their Life Course Model.

Target population age range expanded to include those as young as 12 years old.

## 2017

CCF revisits its evaluation approach and sets goals around potential expansion and replication of BLOOM's work in other communities and with other populations.

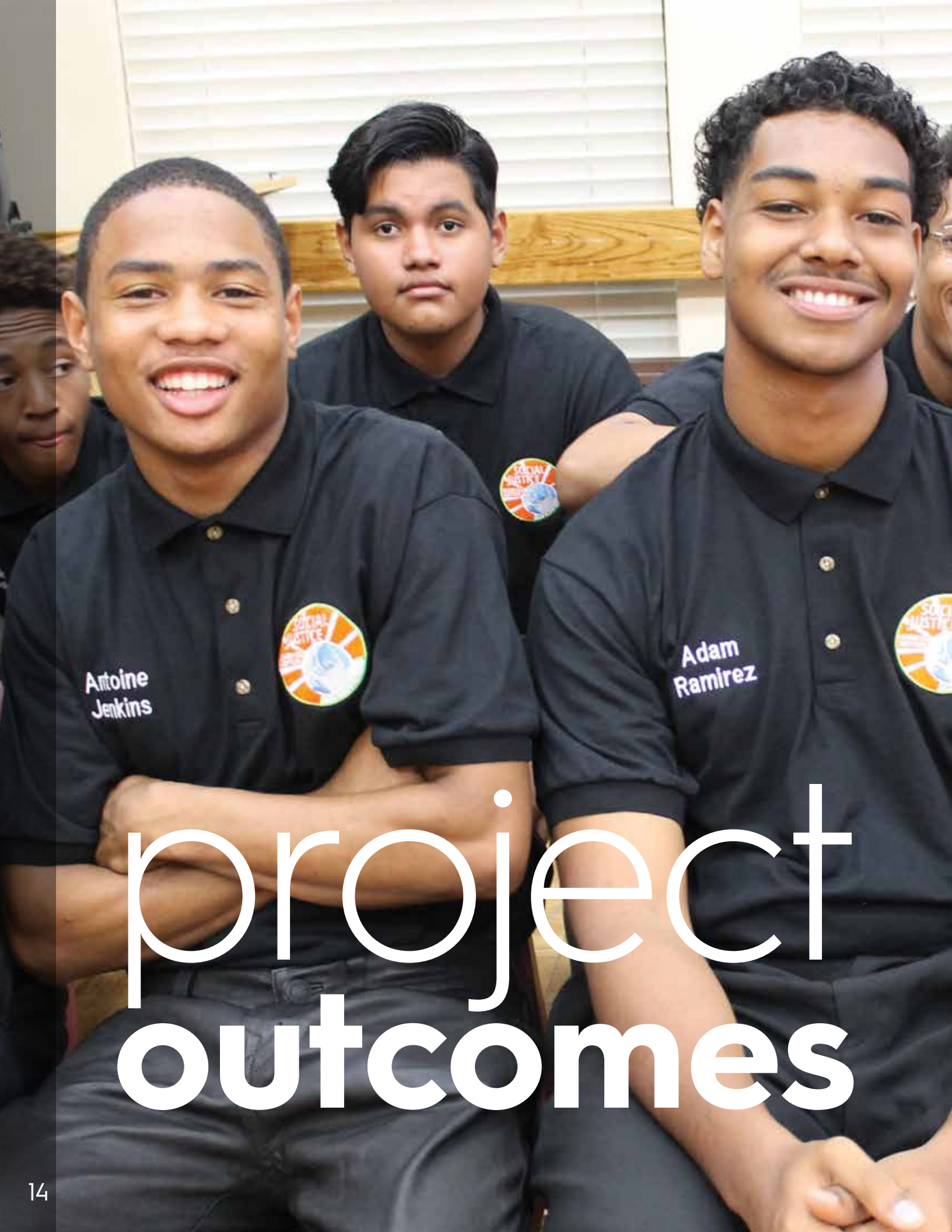
## 2018

The Obama Foundation announces that BLOOM (in partnership with Liberty Hill and L.A. County) was selected as one of 10 Impact Communities, the highest award tier in the MBK Community Challenge Competition. The award was accompanied by a \$425,000 prize, and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health committed \$575,000 to match the MBK Community Challenge funding.

## 2019

CCF expands engagement with local government partners to explore how the BLOOM model and community foundations can leverage public dollars to expand BLOOM-like work throughout the County. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a historic public-private partnership between the Los Angeles County Probation Department, the Liberty Hill Foundation, and the California Community Foundation. This collaboration will dramatically increase services and opportunities delivered by local community-based organizations to youth impacted by the justice system and vulnerable youth to prevent them from entering the justice system altogether.



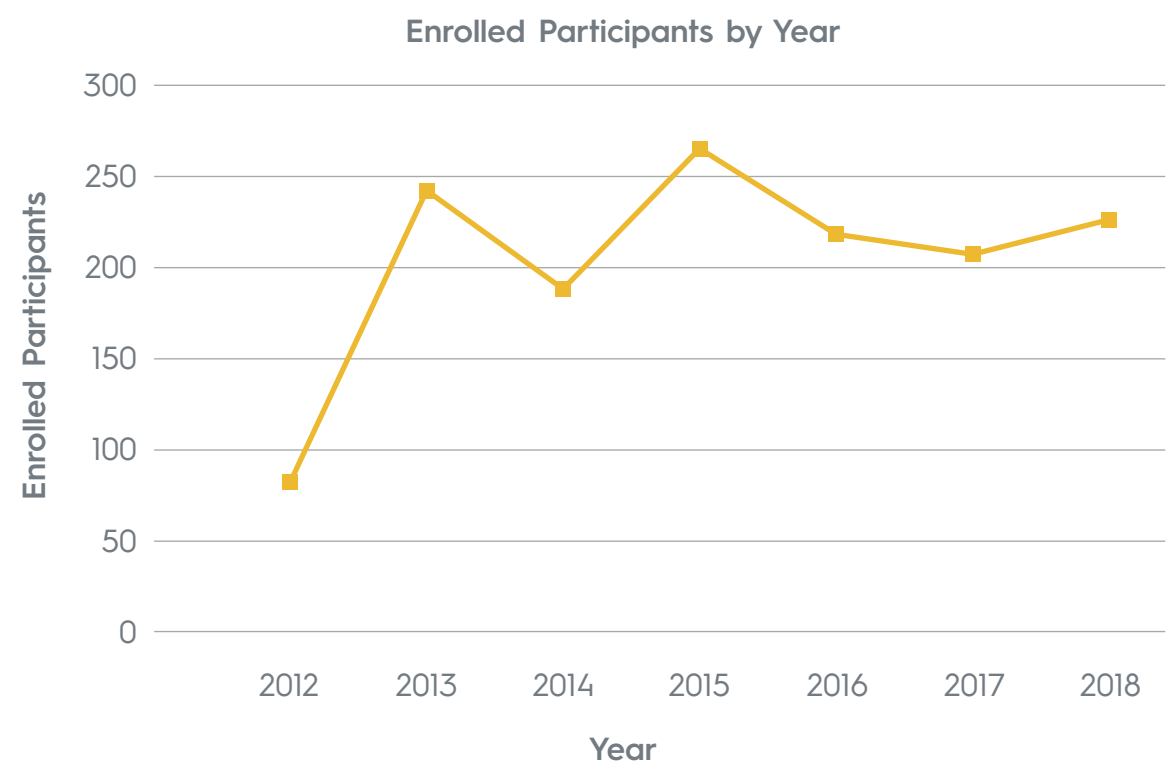


# project outcomes

"I could train you to do this work. But to really do the work, you have to have heart. You have to be willing to put the needs of others before your own desires. You have to live that." –Mentor

Recognizing that thoughtful and consistent evaluation practices are essential to program development, CCF contracted with UCLA from 2012-2017 to lead annual assessments of the program, and in 2018 engaged the Claremont Evaluation Center's Education, Development, and Evaluation Lab (EDEVAL Lab) to synthesize the existing evaluation data. The highlights of this analysis are as follows.

**Participation:** Over the span of seven years, nearly 800 participants were involved in BLOOM, with the majority, more than 60%, holding an enrolled status in the most recent year for which data is available. The average length of time a participant stayed enrolled was almost two years. As may be expected, participation in BLOOM varied over the first few years of its life span, but became more stable in the last three years. Despite the initial variance, the program served an average of 205 youth annually.

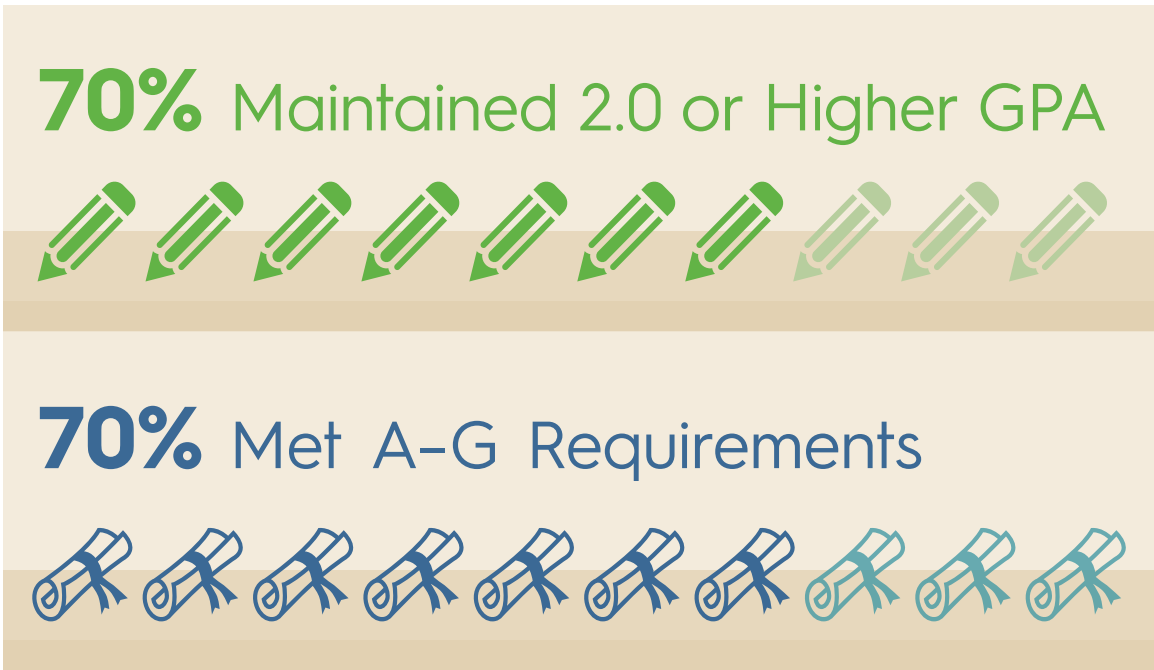




**Rate of Reoffense:** The large majority of BLOOMers—nearly 90%—did not reoffend while they were enrolled in the initiative, indicating that BLOOM has been effective in achieving one of its key program goals.<sup>4</sup>



**Education:** Because of the programmatic shift, for most cases, education data was only collected for the last two years of the initiative (2017 and 2018). That said, nearly 70% of BLOOMers maintained a GPA of 2.01 or higher in at least one of the two years, and nearly 40% of Bloomers maintained this GPA in both years. During the same time frame, nearly 70% of enrolled BLOOMers met A-G requirements.



**Behavioral:** While nearly three-quarters of all BLOOMers had been suspended and/or expelled prior to their involvement in the initiative, the percent of BLOOMers suspended and/or expelled dropped considerably from 70% to 18%, less than one-fifth of participants, during the initiative. This is an important success for BLOOM.





# Qualitative Outcomes

To supplement quantitative metrics, BLOOMers were interviewed and asked about how their participation in BLOOM has impacted their lives. We have synthesized their reflections into the following key insights.

## 1. The relationship between the youth and their older male mentors is the key to success.

The success of BLOOM is achieved through the unwavering commitment of the BLOOM partners to the youth. Perhaps the most essential ingredient of this is the trusting relationship between BLOOMers and their mentors. Nearly every single interviewee emphasized how important consistency is to helping support better outcomes for Black male youth.

BLOOM mentors to youth are Black male adults who share similar backgrounds to the participants. Mentors sometimes struggle to build authentic relationships with participants when the latter first enter the program. Some BLOOMers require their mentors to have what one mentor calls having “hood capital,” which goes beyond cultural competency to a deeper understanding of the young men’s experiences. For some young BLOOMers, their program mentors are the first and only positive male role model they have ever had.



“I would describe [my mentor] as a father, brother, coach, everything. He’s probably one of the greatest men to ever step into my life. He’s criticized me to the point where I wanted to cry, and he’s congratulated me to the point where I wanted to cry. He’s just everything that I’ve always wanted in the man because I never really had it growing up.”

—BLOOMer, age 17

## 2. Addressing past and present trauma in youth is essential to long-term success.

Organizations must integrate components that address the ongoing trauma experienced by Black youth in geographies like South L.A. Some young men have absent fathers, live in poverty, are exposed to violence, and have relatives who are incarcerated. The resilience of these young men has helped them to survive and use creative approaches to navigate an unpredictable environment.

According to Forward Change Consulting, one of the dimensions of human development is socio-emotional skill development, which includes:

- Emotion and behavior regulation
- Autonomy
- Determination
- Self-monitoring and metacognition

Both BHC and SJLI have socio-emotional components that help youth address past and present trauma, including: circles of trust or “council”<sup>5</sup>, journaling, reflection, and bonding time with fellow BLOOMers. And while these strategies are critical, they don’t erase the realities of gang violence, peer pressure, racism, and police brutality.



### 3. Further wraparound services are needed

Because of BLOOM, many youth have been able to change the trajectory of their lives for the better—but more support is required. These youth have a myriad of challenges that lie ahead, beyond high school and through college graduation. Many of the young men interviewed expressed that wraparound services to address needs around housing, transportation, and food insecurities would be key to their long-term success.

Although BHC and SJLI staff go above and beyond the call of duty, there is still so much more needed to support these exceptional young men. One young man suggested having parenting classes to not only help their family members develop better guidance skills, but also to help BLOOMers who might already be young fathers themselves.

What has become evident is that funders and consultants must take an asset-based approach when working with Black boys and young men and shed the deficit-based thinking that paints them as incapable of leading lives that are productive and meaningful. This population, while desperately needing resources that lead to better outcomes, possesses ingenuity, creativity, and strength. Some BLOOMers aspire to be artists, policymakers, businessmen, or inventors. Many participants want to go on to college before they decide on their chosen career path. But the reality is that for some BLOOMers, the program means the difference between life and death.

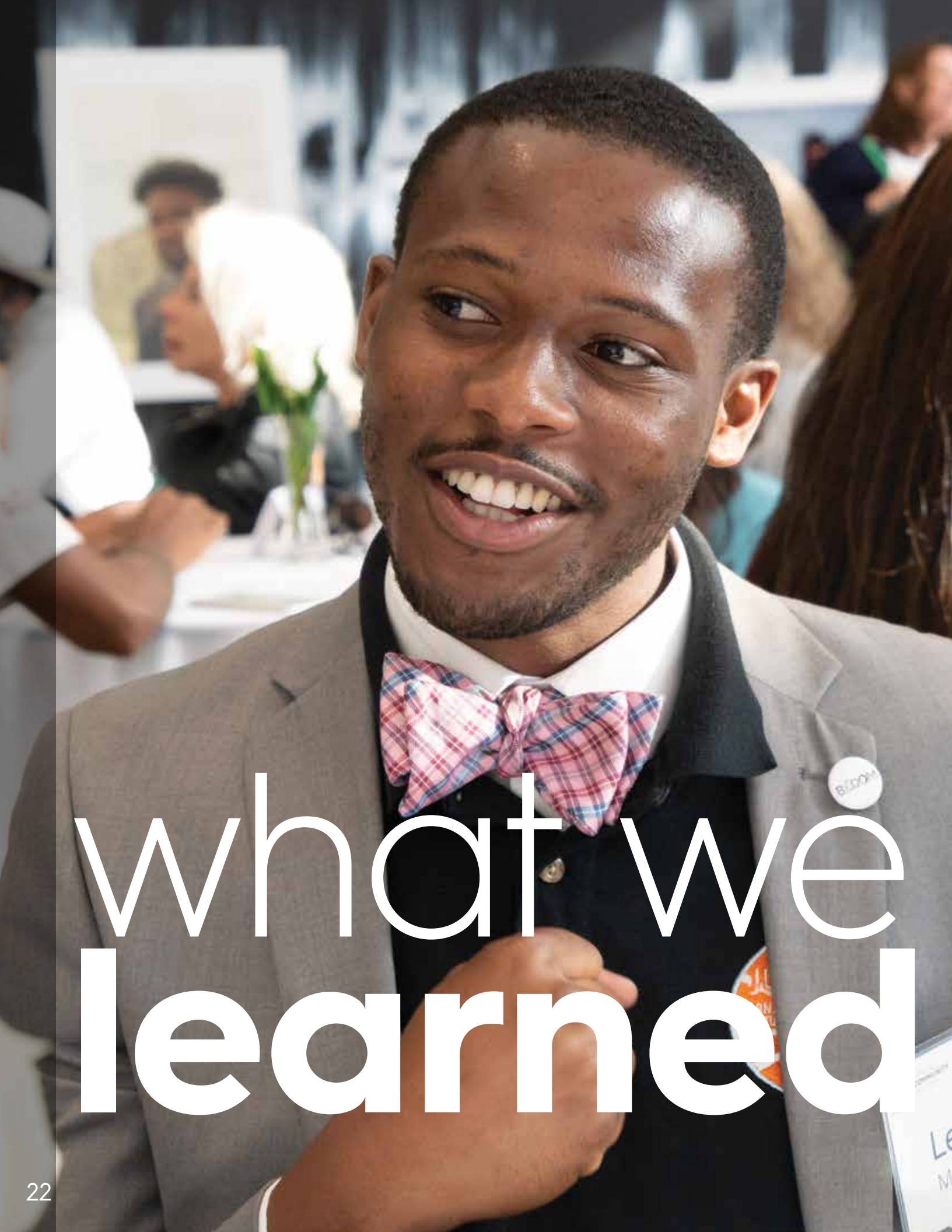
“My favorite part of BLOOM is the circles. It helps you relieve a lot of stress, you can say anything you want. I’ve heard ‘I don’t wanna be here, I wanna kill myself.’ You just talk about everything.”

—BLOOMer, age 14

“Our kids suffer through so much trauma. They’ve been abandoned, neglected...all these things. And it’s so sensitive.” —Mentor

“When we graduate, it’s still tough... when you’re an adult, you’re trying to find a quality job, living is hard, some people have kids, so it’s pretty tough.” —BLOOMer, age 22





# what we learned

“One of the pitfalls we fell into was that the Advisory Committee did not have a clear idea of how to achieve the outcomes we wanted.” —Advisory Committee Member

Based on qualitative and quantitative methods, we can say affirmatively that BLOOM has helped hundreds of young Black men pursue and achieve academic, career, and personal success while avoiding becoming entangled with the criminal justice systems. In our evaluation, we didn’t just focus on whether or not the program works; we focused on why it works, and on what we can learn from the process of developing and implementing the initiative. As we scaled up the program, we had real success, but we also made and learned from mistakes.

BLOOM and the passionate staff and organizations who implement it have made meaningful contributions to the boys and men of color work being done across California and the nation. The curricula that CCF developed with BHC and SJLI were already helping Black male youth to assess injustice, advocate for equity, and encourage self-discovery and cultural awareness. We merely applied these curricula to the Black male youth who are currently in L.A. County’s juvenile justice and who, without some effective intervention, would likely end up incarcerated as adults. We co-created common goals for the initiative, developed resources for the work, and put sustainability plans into place, but BHC and SJLI did the hardest part: implementing the program.

We learned so much along the way because we asked tough questions and challenged our own assumptions, even when it would have been easier to rely on conventional wisdom. We conducted interviews with BLOOM stakeholders and pushed for honest feedback, even when it was hard to hear. Most importantly, we partnered with organizations who share our fierce commitment to the future of our Black boys and young men. As a result, CCF has learned how to better support and provide resources to expert place-based organizations already working to create positive outcomes for young Black males.

## 1. Big Change Takes Big Commitments

When CCF released the initial request for proposals (RFP), we received responses from community groups that were working with probation youth using a variety of interventions. Many of their program models did not fit with the outcomes we ultimately pursued, such as direct academic outcomes.

This was a mistake—we should have spent more time developing our theory of change to narrow our focus or proceeded with a smaller cohort. Initially we offered only one-year grants in the \$50,000-\$100,000 range. Larger, longer grants to the partners that most aligned with our vision would have empowered them to set up new programs and refine their visions, yielding the kind of change we were seeking. Instead, we waited until the fourth year to clarify the model around comprehensive youth development services including academic advancement, mentoring, and life skills.

## 2. Empower Your Community

The role of a community foundation should not be to drive an agenda, but rather to bring together stakeholders and establish buy-in on common goals and outcomes. We found that a volunteer Advisory Committee is an effective vehicle for creating accountability and resource sharing, as well as creating internal and external champions of the work.

Committee members have been a constant source of support and insight and have helped keep BLOOM on track. They continue to offer their personal and professional connections to grantees and BLOOMers. Their only major critique has been that they met in person too infrequently, and we would encourage others replicating this model to build in more frequent touchpoints or to use digital technology to facilitate greater involvement.

## 3. Commit for the Long Term

Creating systemic change takes time. Innovation requires trial and error, a willingness to learn, continuous adjustment, and much patience.

BLOOM was CCF's first venture into juvenile justice work. Though the excitement around boys and men of color work left some stakeholders wanting to scale up the initiative before fully defining and validating the program model, the knowledge base simply wasn't there. To cite just one example, the Advisory Committee early on sought to serve 2,000 young Black men in the probation system in South L.A. This was too narrow a focus though, because it failed to capture the sizable population who were "at-risk of being system-involved." Because we had a long-term commitment to the work, we could revise our strategy while maintaining the commitments and momentum that had been established.

"Then and now, the [Advisory Committee] is probably the most strategic asset BLOOM has. They are the ones who have been the guardians, the protectors, the pushers...These are the people who feel the work in their heart—they're angels." —CCF Staffer

BLOOM has also had the long-term support of CCF's program staff and leadership, as well as the Advisory Committee and committed grantees who have been able to give stability and consistency to the efforts. Framing this as a long-term initiative from day one, CCF restructured the work of the program staff assigned to BLOOM early on so that it would be this person's full portfolio.

## 4. Build Capacity and Infrastructure

Community organizations don't need mandates, they need infrastructure and resources that set them up for success and sustainability.

At the outset, CCF engaged grantees in the evaluation design process with UCLA's Black Male Institute. The Foundation later engaged Forward Change Consulting to help the Advisory Committee narrow its focus on a specific metric (i.e., high school graduation), and to articulate and document the program models. This capacity-building support has been essential to helping BLOOM grantees build their evidence base for success, so they can be better positioned to replicate their models and compete for potential funding opportunities, in particular an upcoming line of Los Angeles County Probation Department funding redirected to youth development programs. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a public-private partnership between the Los Angeles County Probation Department, the Liberty Hill Foundation, and the California Community Foundation. The grants distributed through this partnership will expand opportunities and resources for programs that keep vulnerable youth out of the justice system and help those in the system transition back into the community. These programs provide critical socio-emotional support that is proven to successfully prevent many youth from entering the juvenile justice system, while also cutting the recidivism rates of those who have.



## 5. Align Program and Evaluation Methods

BLOOM partners need to take intentional steps to ensure their respective program frameworks are aligned with the common goals and outcomes toward which they are working. Program design should be community-informed and adaptable to make room for innovative approaches, while still being firm enough to show progress.

Though both SJLI and BHC were already making a difference in the lives of Black male youth in South L.A., a clear intervention point and the articulation of outcomes were absent from their models. Without evidence to prove success, SJLI and BHC would struggle to secure funding and replicate their efforts. By bringing in Forward Change's Life Course Framework, we provided critical evidence for our shared assumption that high school graduation can prevent incarceration for most people. At the same time, the Life Course Framework also allowed them to bolster their work around additional critical, measurable intervention points such as school readiness, grade-level proficiency, high school diploma attainment, postsecondary education/training, housing, and employment.

This cannot be a one-way flow of information, though. It is critical that the collaborative and the individual grantee organizations be able to track success and demonstrate impact through data collection that occurs internally both to build capacity and to ensure that the data collection is not intrusive or inconsistent with organizational values. To build an evidence-based model that can be replicated, evaluators must engage organizations in articulating and refining goals, metrics, and outcomes so that evaluation is informed through continuous learning and refinement by those implementing the programs.

BLOOM grantees worked directly with UCLA's Black Male Institute and the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs to design the evaluation which included baseline culturally-specific questions to track grantees' success; however, some of the data collected by the grantees was inconsistent. Consistent definitions and coding of key terms were not maintained within the data sets. In discussion and debriefs, grantees were encouraged to use a portion of their unrestricted operating grants to hire program evaluation staff. Though capacity to do this work was difficult initially, the larger grants in years four and five began to address this need.

"Without evaluation, what are our stories? We need to learn who is being enrolled, how they are being recruited, what is their academic progress, who stayed in the programs and why."

—Advisory Committee Member

## 6. Cultivate trust between donors, grantees, and the community

Creating more opportunities for youth to engage directly with donors is often the most powerful and compelling way to garner donor support. Without a nuanced exposure to the targeted population, donors risk objectifying marginalized communities, misunderstanding the work of foundations and nonprofits, or not knowing what role they should play. Foundations should build strong relationships with donors so their gifts and interests align. With proper guidance from foundations, donors can be engaged listeners who understand why and how they should commit to investing in communities.

Making introductions to donors isn't enough. Potential donors may be new to the issues or even be unfamiliar with the geographic areas the issues impact. If grantees are trained and prepared, they are more likely to be successful in building relationships that can fund their work. Part of capacity-building is teaching grantees to tell the story of their program's impact. This skill helps build trust between grantees and donors and proves effective for fundraising.

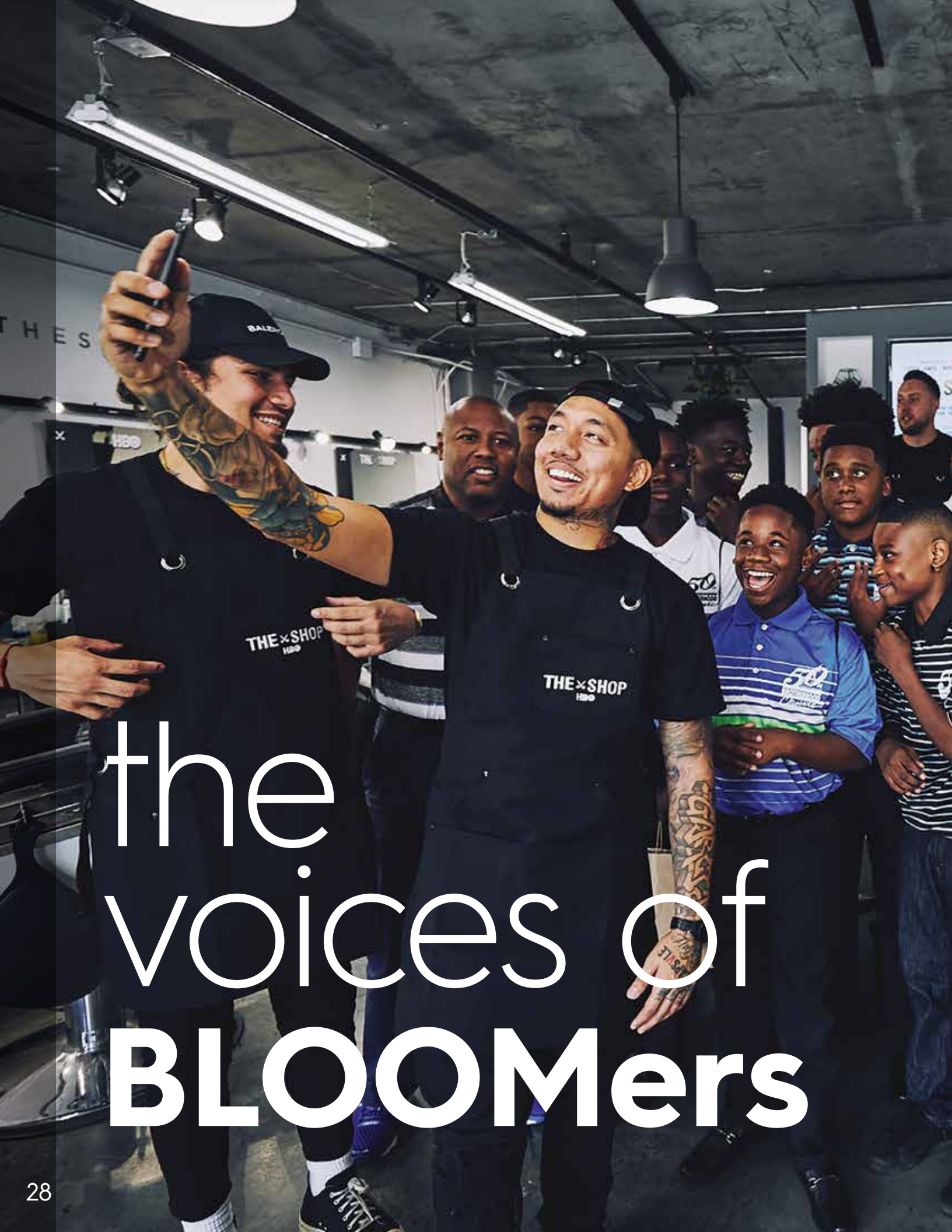
Grantees like BHC and SJLI rely on donors to fund expansion of their work. Finding appropriate points of connection between the two helps to create trust and build long-term relationships. To that end, CCF was able to connect potential donors with BLOOMers over the course of the initiative through fundraising events and one-on-one donor site visits to the organizations. BLOOMers were prepared by partner organizations on how to interact authentically with donors in different settings.

For example, in July 2018, CCF hosted "A Midsummer Night in BLOOM," which brought together more than 150 donors, community members, elected officials, nonprofits, and foundations to hear BLOOMers' stories. The event was designed to ensure BLOOMers were sitting with guests and engaging in meaningful conversations. It was an opportunity for key policymakers, including the mayor, county supervisors, and councilmembers serving South L.A., to speak directly with youth. The event also allowed the young men to practice their networking and engagement skills. This kind of deep engagement, in which powerful leaders and generous donors saw the true potential of Black boys and young men who are too often written off, can have a long-term impact well beyond any individual program or investment.

"I sat with the Mayor, Chief Probation Officer, and the head of CCF! I never thought that Mayor Garcetti would know more about me than I know about him. He told me to 'Be and own who I am.'" —BLOOMer, age 19

"When people can talk to young men who have been impacted by the work, that is the best lesson learned."

—Grantee Partner



# the voices of BLOOMers

A best practice in philanthropy is to hear from those impacted by your efforts. Foundations need to take a moment and listen. Here is what BLOOMers want you to know:

"If I could communicate one message to a large audience...I would say expose. Expose youth to visions greater than the eye can see, because they're the future."  
—BLOOMer, age 17

"Growing up in our neighborhoods, we learn how to read people [which] helps you negotiate, learn their intentions. Now I'm able to read people AND articulate myself and be in these business situations." —BLOOMer, age 22

"We get to meet a lot of people and they let us explore our creative side. They let me push my music endeavors—I never thought I'd be on the stage with a group singing, dancing and rapping. I'm a musician. I thought I was going to be in the NFL, but now I want to be a photojournalist." —BLOOMer, age 18

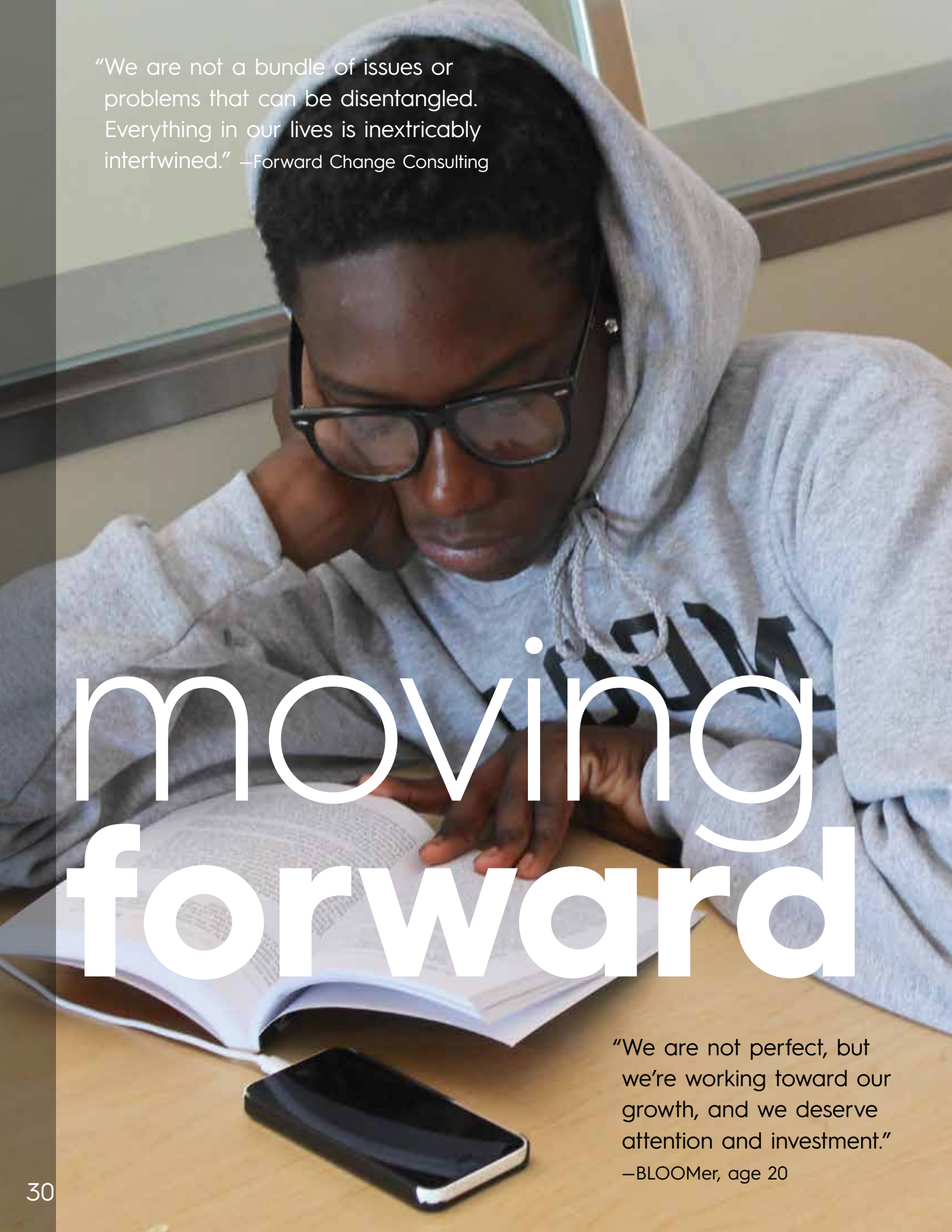
"[It's] super-important to me that this program is dedicated to young Black men...because of how the world looks at us and trains us to look at ourselves. They tell us all these negative things about ourselves from children to adulthood."  
—BLOOMer, age 19

"With BLOOM, I am doing stuff I never thought I'd be doing. [I] gave a speech at the State Capitol...I'm not only fighting for me, I'm fighting for others, too."  
—BLOOMer, age 19

"When we want people to invest in us, we have to show them why they ought to invest in us. Stereotypes always jump in their brains, so we have to show them that all the work that these young men can do and will do with the proper push...just like your children." —BLOOMer, age 15

"We give love and we need love." —BLOOMer, age 18





“We are not a bundle of issues or problems that can be disentangled. Everything in our lives is inextricably intertwined.” —Forward Change Consulting

# moving forward

“We are not perfect, but we’re working toward our growth, and we deserve attention and investment.”

—BLOOMer, age 20

As BLOOMers continue to recognize their self-worth, graduate from high school and college, and become leaders in their communities, they will empower and inspire others in their community, a process that has already begun. As these young men grow and have children of their own, they will be able to provide the resources and the guidance that will create future generations of empowered young Black males. Los Angeles and surrounding communities are a better place because of this investment, and the impact on taxpayers will be significant. Going forward, BLOOM is an approach that could reach thousands of boys and young men who have tremendous untapped potential.

CCF exemplifies what can happen when a foundation takes risks and responds to community needs, and this innovation is already spreading beyond our walls. As the Los Angeles County Probation Department is working to redefine diversion efforts, it is partnering with CCF and Liberty Hill to disburse public funds to organizations interested in replicating youth development efforts like BLOOM. This is vital, because systems can only change when communities are resourced and can advocate for what they know they need.

This new public-private partnership is a very important shift in a system that has historically been risk averse. It aligns with CCF’s goal to build a system that replaces the traditional structures of punishment and incarceration with best practices centered on healing, learning, and opportunity. Going forward, grantees will receive funding for their critical work to strengthen education, mental health, cultural and workforce programs, while also benefiting from training and support to build capacity for growth and success.

Although BLOOM’s original focus was high school graduation, CCF learned that social inequities must be addressed in multiple ways, by leveraging expertise and building on existing efforts within education, housing, and health, to name a few. Furthermore, CCF realized the work of BLOOM is not merely a juvenile justice issue, but a multifaceted attempt to redress racial inequalities in our society. The problems young Black men, and BLOOMers in particular, face cannot be solved by one isolated strategy.

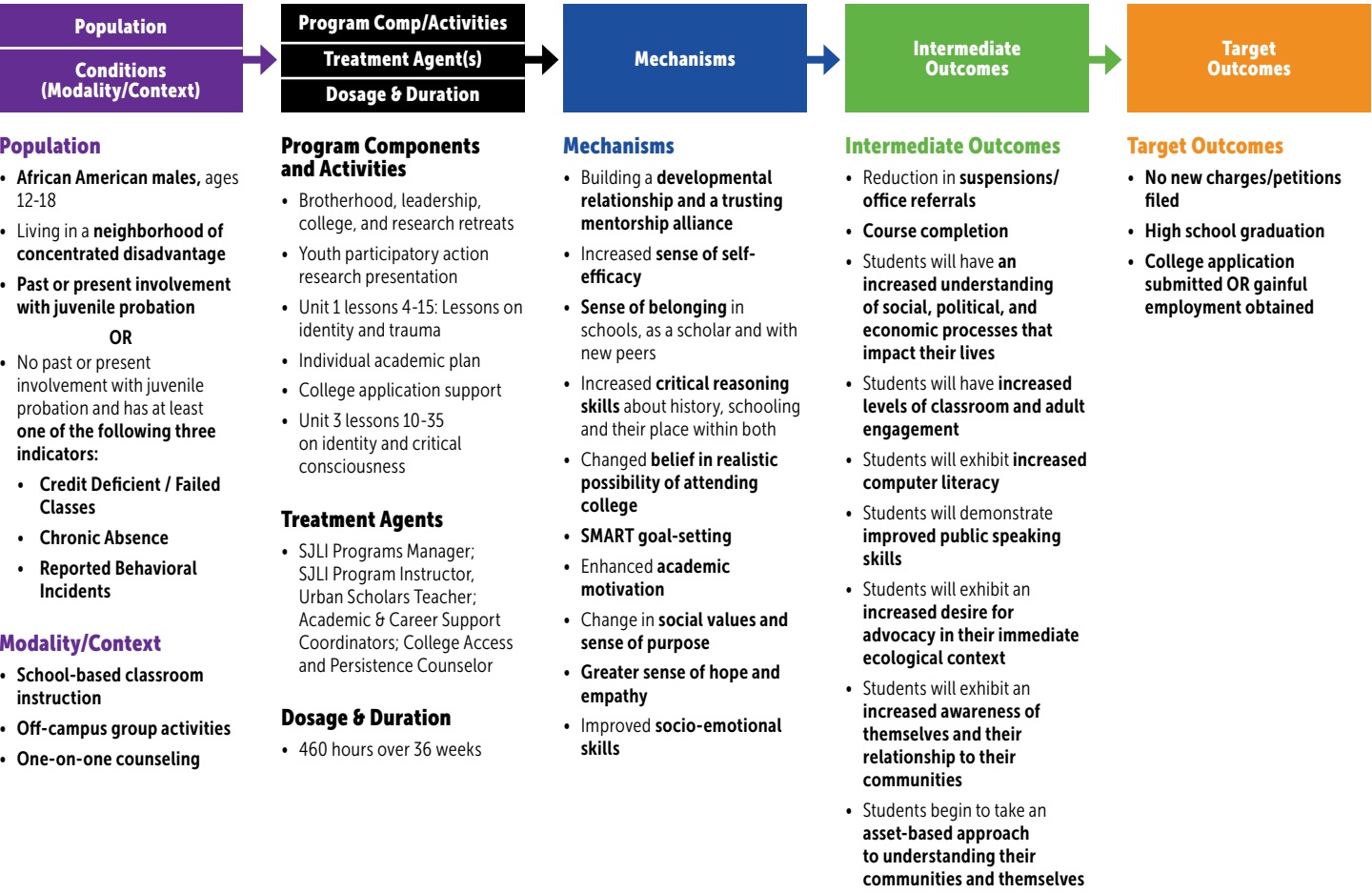
CCF now knows—through the BLOOM program and others like it, as well as ample outside research—that approaches to supporting system-involved and vulnerable young people are most effective when they consider the whole young person and provide comprehensive, community-embedded opportunities for social reconnection. The process of building out these opportunities requires a long-term strategy based on an enduring commitment to both systemic change and systems creation.

Though BLOOM as a CCF-led initiative is winding down, the impact of the program will endure. If we apply what we learned in this work, continue to build authentic partnerships, and invest smartly, then CCF and the boys and men of color field can improve the prospects for Black boys and young men and ensure that our communities benefit from their talents, skills, and dedication.

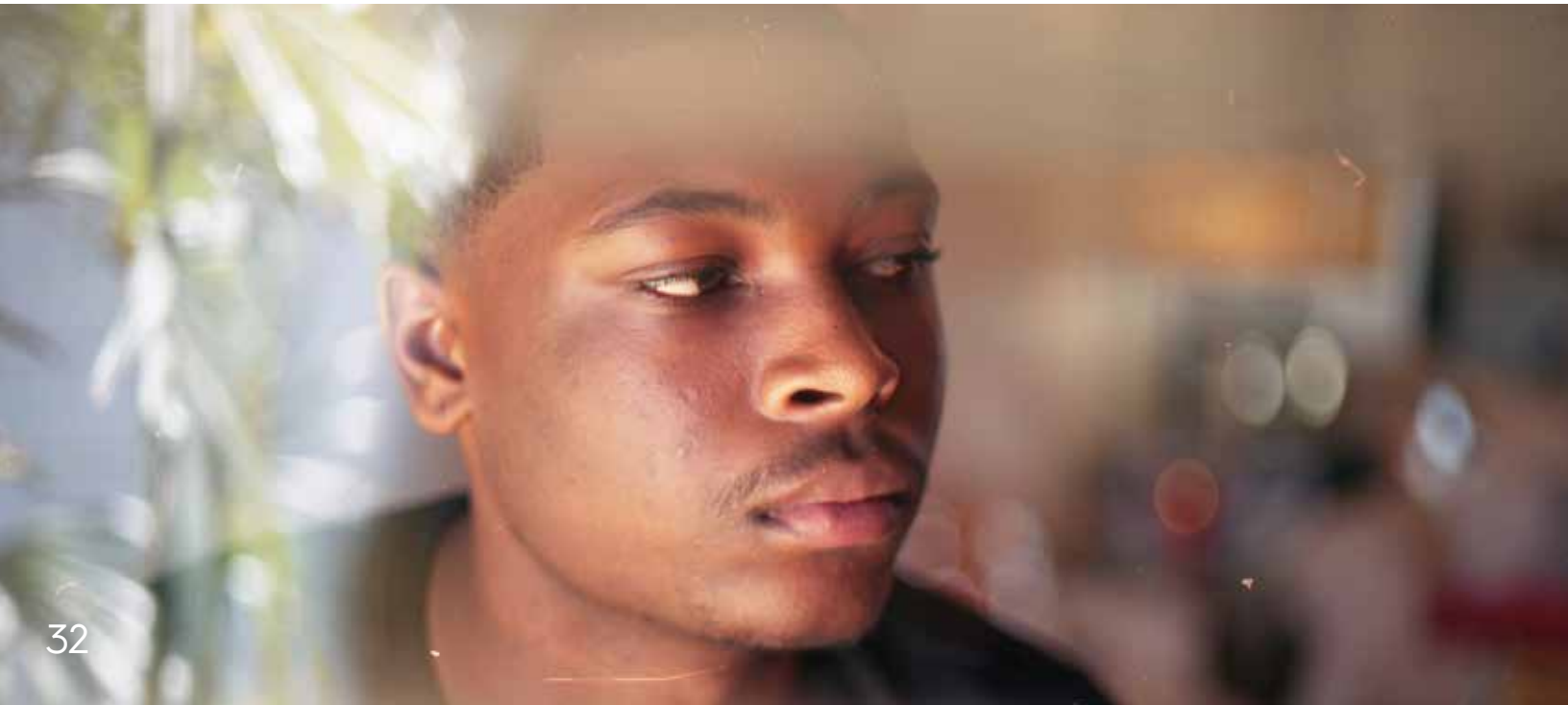
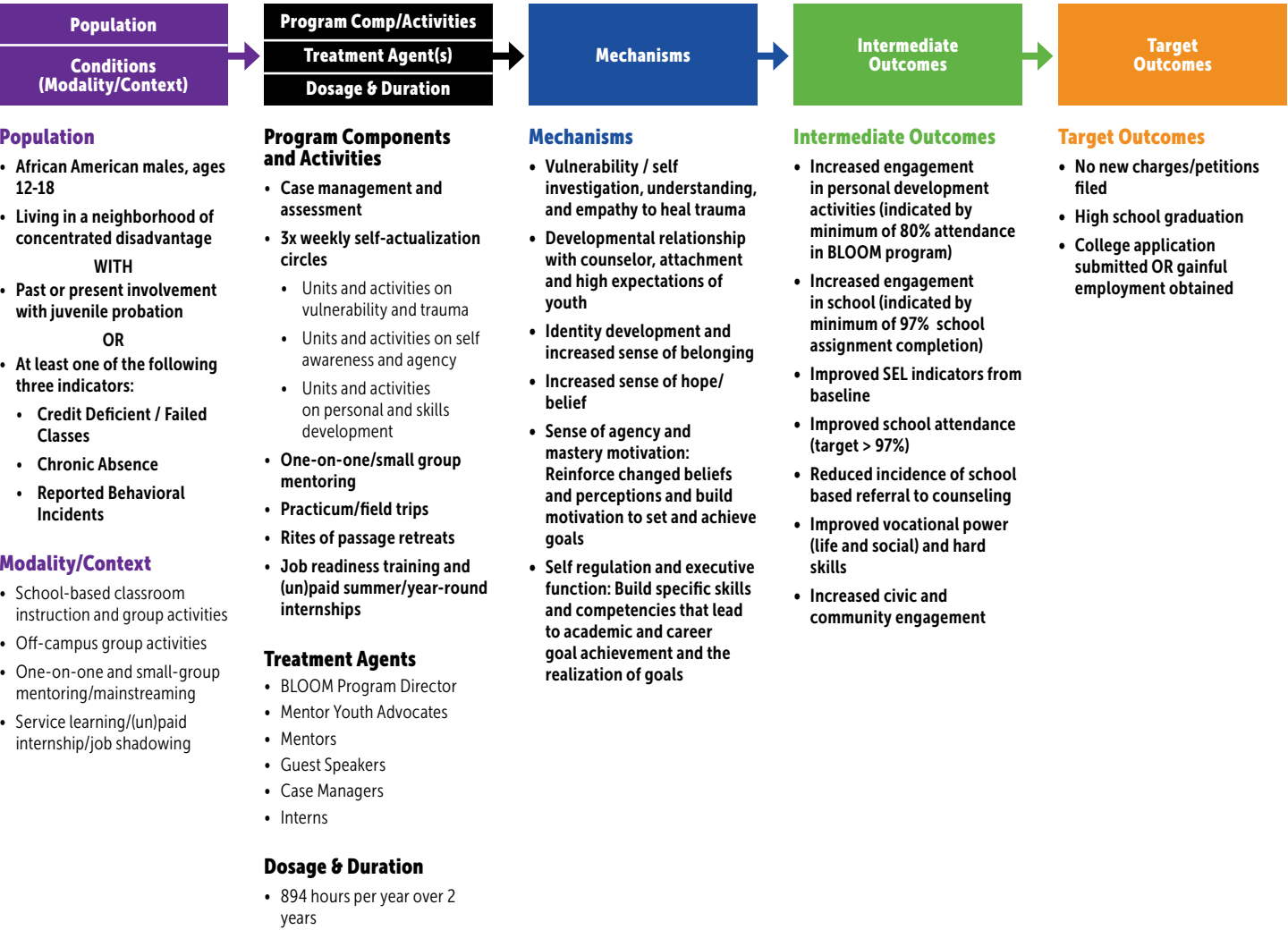


APPENDIX A: Program Models

SJLI BLOOM Program Model



Brotherhood Crusade BLOOM Program Model





# APPENDIX B: Interviewees and Sample Interview Questions



## CCF STAFF (past & present)

Alvertha Penny, Former VP of Programs  
Jai Phillips, Program Manager  
John E. Kobara, COO  
Kristina McGee, Former Program Manager  
Nike Irvin, Former VP of Programs  
Robert Lewis, Former Program Director

## PARTNERS

Julio Marcial, Liberty Hill Foundation  
Vincent Holmes, County of Los Angeles

## CONSULTANTS

Arnold Chandler, Forward Change  
Jorja Leap, UCLA Luskin School  
Tia Martinez, Forward Change  
Todd Franke, UCLA Luskin School

## ANCHOR PARTNERS

Charisse Bremond, Brotherhood Crusade  
D’Artagnan Scorza,  
Social Justice Learning Institute  
David Turner, Social Justice Learning Institute  
George Weaver, Brotherhood Crusade  
Mykol Lewis, Brotherhood Crusade

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Carl Ballton, Senior VP, Union Bank  
David Crippens, Adjunct Lecturer, USC  
Karim Webb, Entrepreneur, PCF Management  
Olivia Mitchell, Los Angeles County Probation  
Commissioner  
Virgil Roberts, Managing Partner,  
Bobbitt & Roberts

## BLOOMers

Ahmir, 18  
Daymond, 17  
Davon, 14  
Joaquin, 19  
Kevin, 19  
Marcus, 22  
Rufus, 15  
Samuel, 16  
Stevon, 20

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For CCF staff (past and present), BLOOM Advisory Committee members, consultants, and nonprofit partners. Slight variations or additional questions were asked depending on the individual’s role in the BLOOM initiative.

### Describe how BLOOM came to be.

- What is your vision for BLOOM?
- Describe the key milestones and distinct shift points for BLOOM during your involvement with the initiative.
- What outcomes did you hope would be achieved by CCF and its partners?
- How do the demographic shifts in South L.A. impact BLOOM?
- What does “sustainability” for BLOOM look like from your perspective? Why is it important that BLOOM is sustainable?
- What are three-to-five things that you feel worked particularly well for BLOOM’s success?
- What three-to-five things would you have changed to make BLOOM even more successful and sustainable?
- What else is important for us to lift up as “lessons learned” for funders, potential future donors, and nonprofits?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BLOOMers

- How did you hear about BLOOM?
- How old were you when you joined?
- What was your life like before coming to BLOOM?
- What have been the biggest changes in your life since coming to BLOOM?
- What one accomplishment are you most proud of since you began participating in this program?
- If you could change something about the services you are receiving, what would it be?
- What was the best or most helpful part of the program for you?
- Is it important to you that the program is all young Black men, and why or why not? Would you ever want to see a program that includes other young men of color, and why or why not?
- How have other people in your life reacted to your evolution since coming to BLOOM?
- What are your goals for life beyond BLOOM?
- What would you tell other young Black men who might benefit from a program like BLOOM?





## Notes

- 1 JJCPA Program Evaluation and Improvement Plan, RDA, D. Mayer and Dr. M. Rabinowitz, February 2018
- 2 Bureau of Justice Statistics Estimates of the Proportion of the Male Population Who Ever Served Time in a State or Federal Prison, by Race-Ethnicity and Age, and California Department of Corrections Estimates of the Proportion Who Ever Served Time in a California State Prison During the 1990s, by Race, Age, and Educational Attainment
- 3 Ferner, Matt (2016). "The Full Cost of Incarcerating in the U.S. is Over \$1 Trillion, Study Finds." Huffington Post
- 4 Given the large sample size and the nearly 90% who did not reoffend, these findings are robust in demonstrating program effectiveness with respect to this goal. It is noted that to validate this finding empirically, comparison data would be needed.
- 5 Council is an age-old practice with indigenous roots that involves bringing people together in a circle to bear witness and share authentically. Participants agree to speak one-at-a-time, sharing their personal stories and experiences, rather than opinions, and listening non-judgmentally while others do the same. (Center for Council)





221 South Figueroa St., Suite 400

Los Angeles, CA 90012

[p] 213.413.4130

[f] 213.383.2046

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