RESILIENCE ORANGE COUNTY 2023

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INTRODUCTION

“I think my vision is for young people to experiment with new organizing strategies, but also remain grounded in knowledge and sharing that knowledge.”

- Claudia Perez, Executive Director, Resilience Orange County

BACKGROUND

Based in Santa Ana, California, Resilience Orange County (ROC) is a grassroots organizing group that initially focused on addressing the criminalization of young people and immigrants. Founded in 2016 by young residents of Santa Ana who were personally invested in tackling broken immigration laws, punitive school discipline policies, and unfair policing, ROC developed comprehensive programming to help young people thrive and hold institutions accountable to their largely immigrant community. Within several years, ROC's founders and members played a central role in diminishing the school-to-prison-to deportation pipeline in Orange County and securing vital resources for the community's well-being. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization has devoted increased attention to resident organizing. This report contextualizes ROC's work within the broader research on youth civic engagement and immigrant youth incorporation, documenting its groundbreaking youth programming and campaigns during the group's initial years of operation. The summary and analyses presented here rely on in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations collected from 2016-2020, in addition to published academic research, local news media reporting, and voting records. The first section of the report describes the federal, state, and local policy context that motivated ROC's work, and the second section summarizes the organization's history. The third section describes the group's programming, and the fourth section covers some of its campaigns launched before the COVID-19 pandemic. The report concludes by considering the broader implications of ROC's youth programs and includes a list of the organization's early and foundational campaign efforts.

CONTEXT

THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON-TO-DEPORTATION PIPELINE

ROC was initially established in response to federal, state, and local policies that impose widespread criminalization on Santa Ana's disproportionately young and immigrant population. Building on decades of grassroots opposition to such measures, ROC aims to disrupt the "school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline" by demanding that the resources used to criminalize youth be devoted instead to supporting their healthy development and academic success. The notion of a "deportation pipeline" elaborates on the metaphor of the "school-to-prison pipeline" that has been deployed by grassroots youth organizing groups, advocates, and scholars. Sociologist Mark Warren (2021) describes this school-to-prison pipeline as "an interlocking system of policies and practices that push students of color from low-income communities out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice system." Reinforced by white supremacy, the justice system has long applied disproportionately harsh punishments to African-American, Latinx, and other young people of color (Alexander 2010, Jones 2009, Jones 2018, Rios 2011), contributing to increased mass incarceration. Penal approaches to drug use and crime have gone in tandem with deep investments in prisons and law enforcement. In what follows, the report supplies a brief overview of this criminalizing apparatus.

The Reagan administration escalated the war on drugs in the 1980s, and legislation in 1986 and 1988 mandated and increased sentencing for different illicit drugs (Warren 2021). Next came the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which was approved in 1994 and made gang membership a federal crime, reinstated the death penalty, increased prison time for nonviolent offenses, and significantly expanded funding for police and the construction of new prisons. 1986 and 1988 mandated and increased sentencing for different illicit drugs (Warren 2021). Next came the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which was approved in 1994 and made gang membership a federal crime, reinstated the death penalty, increased prison time for nonviolent offenses, and significantly expanded funding for police and the construction of new prisons.

In California, the State Task Force on Youth and Gang Violence (1986) linked youth gangs to increased violence and vandalism in schools, recommending increased surveillance and punishment by law enforcement at every societal level. In 1988, the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act mandated that officials make efforts to identify gang members, enroll them in a statewide database, and enhance sentences for identified gang members convicted of a crime (Sojoyner 2016). In 1994, voters approved Proposition 184 (the "Three Strikes" law), which increased sentencing terms for multiple offenses and included juvenile crimes in calculating sentences (Zimring, Hawkins, and Kamin 2001). These initiatives increased the prison population by nearly 500%, filling 24 prisons built between 1982 and 2000 to capacity (Gilmore 2007). Then, in 2000, Proposition 21 further increased sentencing terms and gave prosecutors the discretion to send minors to adult court (Martinez 2000); about 11,300 adolescents were tried in adult courts between 2003 and 2016, when Proposition 57, which abolished this prosecutorial discretion (Sernoffsky and Palomino 2019), was passed.

Youth of color bore the brunt of these federal and state policies, which increased police budgets and contributed to an exponential growth in prison populations (Gilmore 2007). African Americans are the most frequent victims of unjust targeting by law enforcement, and they are most disproportionately represented in prisons (Alexander 2010, Freiburger and Sheeran 2017, Stuart and Benezra 2017). In California, Latinx, Southeast Asians, and Pacific Islanders have also experienced high rates of racial profiling by police and incarceration (Hope 2019, Kwon 2006, Rios 2007).

School discipline policies have also played a role in this criminalization trend. Policies implemented in the 1990s exacerbated the educational system's longstanding failure to offer a welcoming, inclusive environment for Latinx youth (Gandara and Contreras 2009, Valencia 2004, Valenzuela 1999). In high-poverty, non-White neighborhoods, school discipline policies increasingly became an on-ramp to the prison system. There were increases in suspensions and expulsions, school police presence, student searches, surveillance, ticketing, and on-campus arrests (Warren 2021). Federal funding provided disciplinary incentives through the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act and the 1999 COPS in Schools program, while states and individual school districts enforced policies that policed, surveilled, and punished students, particularly those residing in high-poverty communities of color (Warren 2021). In California, students were commonly suspended if they "disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel" (California Education Code 48900(k)). These zero-tolerance policies took students out of the classroom for short or extended periods of time, undercutting the primary goal of the educational system (Dankner 2018).

The school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately shapes the educational experiences of students of color from high-poverty backgrounds, especially males and those identifying as LGBTQ. Teachers' biases and stereotyping of students factor into these negative experiences, and punitive school discipline policies both directly and indirectly contribute to mass incarceration (Warren 2021).

For undocumented immigrant students, the pipeline has another destination: deportation. Ties between federal immigration enforcement and local law enforcement, including school police, have been strengthened by the Secure Communities 287(g) program, which allows municipal agencies and school police to jail and detain immigrants, including minors (Armenta 2017, Verma, Maloney and Austin 2017). The government's decision to consolidate national security and immigration agencies into the Department of Homeland Security in 2002 further solidified and funded these linkages.

Furthermore, involvement in the criminal justice system makes undocumented youth ineligible for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), President Barack Obama's 2012 executive order providing recipients with administrative relief from deportation and access to work permits (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2021). The efforts led by former President Trump and other conservative voices to end DACA have further increased anxiety among the program's beneficiaries and their networks (Burciaga and Malone 2021; Moreno et al. 2021). Altogether, the criminal and deportation pipelines can have profound impacts on the health and well-being of youths. Fear of police violence, incarceration, and deportation can have broad negative implications for youth transitioning to adulthood (Shedd 2015, Sojoyner 2016).

CRIMINALIZED IN THE OC

ROC's work is particularly urgent in Orange County. With its history of segregating Mexicans and Black residents in schools, public pools, and other public facilities, Orange County has been relatively unwelcoming to immigrants, particularly those from Mexico and Central America (García 2019, Lacayo 2017). Reflecting their racial attitudes, civic leaders took a tough approach to crime and unauthorized immigration that racially profiled people of color. For example, Orange County leaders enthusiastically adopted the Secure Communities 287(g) program, under which law enforcement agencies screened inmates for immigration violations and referred undocumented immigrants to ICE (Avila, Escobosa Helzer and Lai 2019). In 2018, Orange County was the last county to terminate its 287(g) agreement. However, this was only because it violated the 2017 Senate Bill 54, also known as the "State Sanctuary Bill" or the Values Act (Carcamo 2018), which restricted state and local law enforcement's communications with federal immigration authorities and prevented officers from questioning and holding people on immigration violations.

RAIZ staff presenting at OC May Day Coalition on the importance of ending police-ICE collaborations.

The OC context was hostile to Latinx populations in other ways beyond the scope of immigration. Believing that Mexicans and other Latinx residents are inherently prone to criminality, conservative White middle- and upper-class residents encouraged law enforcement to be "tough on crime" (Lacayo 2017). Beginning in 2006, county and city governments allowed suspected gang members to be arrested for a range of activities, many benign: littering, wearing "gang colors" (i.e., blue or red), running late-night errands, being out past a 10 p.m. curfew, or gathering with family members (Barajas 2007, Muniz 2014; Orange County Register, July 2016). These injunctions exacerbated the racial profiling of Latinx youth.

Hostile social climates can have negative consequences for mental health. Young people who experience heavy policing face significant emotional pressures that can hamper their ability to function and succeed (Rendon 2019). Meanwhile, mental health outcomes can worsen when young people fear that they or their family members could be deported (Dreby 2012, García 2018, Rendon 2019). Below, the report describes how ROC's young founders are well acquainted with the negative personal and policy implications of this hostile climate.

ROC'S ORIGIN STORY

ROC was founded by young people who were personally affected by the criminal justice and immigration enforcement system that racially profiled them and their families. As Orange County residents who were undocumented or had undocumented family members, young leaders had firsthand, often traumatizing experiences with the school and community police agencies that collaborated with ICE and with an education system complicit in placing certain Latinx students on a path to prison and deportation. ROC's establishment and mission was thus informed by its leaders' experiences being circumscribed by federal, state, and local measures that criminalized immigrants and young people.

ROC's founders were high school students during the mid-to-late 2000s, when Orange County had vigorously adopted tough policies on crime; collaboration among school administrators, law enforcement, and ICE was at its peak; and the county's 287(g) agreement was being implemented. Some had also witnessed the community's debate over HR4437, also known as the Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The bill would have further criminalized undocumented immigrants, facilitated their deportation, increased penalties for employers who hired undocumented immigrants, and penalized those who assisted known undocumented immigrants (Zepeda-Millán 2017). Santa Ana was one of the 350 localities that staged 2006 immigrant rights protests in opposition to the bill. At the time of the protest, the measure had been approved by the House of Representatives and was under consideration in the Senate.

Early RAIZ members at a New Year celebration in 2014.

In Santa Ana, these protests had a significant youth contingent, with ROC's founders and thousands of their peers walking out of nearly every area high school to participate (Gonzales 2009). In response, 400–500 police officers descended on the protest in Santa Ana and surrounding cities, resulting in a 12-hour standoff between students and the police department.

Political scientist Alfonso Gonzalez likened the scene to a warzone "where police had full riot gear, 'non-lethal' weapons, armored vehicles and contingents of officers mounted on horseback" (44). Several dozen participants were arrested, some of whom were subsequently deported (Gonzales 2009). The protest and violent response drove some young activists to join Dream Team (OCDT), an immigrant rights community group that met at El Centro Cultural de Mexico, a Santa Ana-based community arts, educational, and cultural organizing efforts.

The OCDT helped engage Santa Ana youth leaders in youth-led efforts to support key legislative efforts such as the Federal DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Acts—which provided a pathway to citizenship for eligible undocumented youth—and the California DREAM Act—which offered some in-state financial aid to undocumented students. Select members of the OCDT participated in UCLA's DREAM summer program, which has bolstered an intersectional immigrant rights movement committed to multi-racial alliance building and LGBTQ rights. In this program, youth leaders received invaluable training and tapped into vital activist networks.

By 2010, a core group of young leaders had formed in Santa Ana who would go on to shape youth-led immigrant rights efforts in Orange County and beyond throughout the decade. These leaders included Claudia Perez, Oswaldo Farias, Roberto Herrera, Carlos, Perea, Dulce Saavedra, Carlos Perea, Tony Ortuño, Jorge Gutierrez, Ruben Barreto, Ramon Campus, Ignacio Rios Jr., Maria Zacarias, Yenni Diaz, and Alexis Teodoro, among others. These young people were well-connected in their communities and had experience in youth leadership development, fundraising, service provision to gang-affiliated and other youth with criminal

records, and media outreach, as well as valuable ties to LGBTQ, immigrant rights, and religious-based organizing networks. Although they often faced significant personal, financial, or legal struggles, these organizers had high levels of what Marshall Ganz (Ganz 2000) calls "strategic capacity": a store of local knowledge, the group synergy to creatively resolve problems, and the personal motivation to achieve their goals. These young people brought fresh energy, new intersectional organizing strategies, and a commitment to grassroots youth organizing and related immigrant rights efforts.

Having advocated for the federal and state DREAM Acts, these youth leaders continued to educate the general public about college access for undocumented students and the struggles of undocumented young adults to secure U.S. citizenship. After the Federal DREAM Act failed in December 2010, however, they became increasingly concerned that the DREAM initiatives mainly benefited college students and were thus creating "a good versus bad immigrant narrative." They wanted their mission to be more inclusive of all immigrants, and so certain leaders shifted course "to focus on the criminalization of our people, the school to prison-to-deportation pipeline,'" remembers Abraham Medina, ROC's founding director. Consequently, in 2011 they decided to form RAIZ (Resistencia, Autonomia, Igualdad y Liderazgo), which focused on dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. In 2012, after some RAIZ leaders received DACA, they joined the nonprofit Santa Ana Boys and Men of Color (SABMOC) coalition, which engaged young men in violence prevention, leadership development, and systems change efforts. With their overlapping memberships, RAIZ and SABMOC worked on shared campaigns that addressed the criminalization of immigrants and youth. In 2016, the two organizations decided to merge, hiring young leaders who had a demonstrated commitment to advancing justice for Santa Ana's youth and residents.

"We saw that we needed to create spaces where we did leadership development that took into account trauma and cultural relevance. We cared about taking on questions like: How do we help youth develop as they transition from like junior high to high school? Are our programs developmentally informed, and how do we support youth through these stages of growth while they're learning about systems change?"

- Abraham Medina, Founding Executive Director, ROC (September 2017)

ROC'S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

ROC aimed to develop members into changemakers within their own low-income, largely immigrant communities. To this end, its programming helped members to make sense of and confront everyday economic challenges, schools and communities with an oppressive police presence, and the fear of being deported or seeing family and other community members deported. ROC's founders drew on their own political development in designing the curriculum and training program. As Dulce Saavedra, an ROC staff member, explained, "The programming was based on their own learnings and experiences. We recognized our own journey to become organizers and how we didn't just become organizers overnight. It took definitely a lot of self-discovery and learning about what was happening to our communities." As outlined in the following sections, ROC's founders sought to cultivate the transformative leadership capacities of youth members by (1) promoting self-awareness and healthy development; (2) offering a critical civics education that increases social consciousness; and (3) engaging them in civic action.

Before describing these programs in greater detail, it is important to note that during the 2020 pandemic, ROC added online programming. During this period, it devoted greater resources to existing members' mental health needs; provided them guidance on how to keep themselves and their families safe; established a mutual aid fund; around the pandemic response; and addressed anti-Black racism. After the height of the pandemic, ROC's programming continued to evolve in response to community needs and staff capacities.

SELF-AWARENESS, HEALING, AND DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS

In its early years, ROC established comprehensive programming that supported healthy youth development and self-awareness. The group offered gender-specific lessons and activities that helped young members develop pride in their indigenous roots and make sense of the violence and criminalization in their communities. It also focused on mental health by introducing members, many of whom had experienced significant stress and hardship, to healing and self-care practices. ROC practices also promoted academic achievement, and the group offered additional training and support for immigrant students facing barriers to citizenship.

To introduce members to healing and culturally informed youth development, ROC incorporated two established curricula—Joven Noble and Xinachtli—developed by the National Compadres Network, an organization seeking to rehabilitate Chicano youth exposed to gang violence. Established in 1988, the National identity, values, traditions, and indigenous practices of Chicano, Latino, Native, Raza, and other communities of color as the path to the honoring of all their relations and lifelong well-being. Many ROC founders encountered this curriculum as members of the Boys and Men of Color project, subsequently adopting and refining the programming as they were establishing ROC.

> *"Xinachtli and Joven Noble is ... learning about yourself, learning about where ... your anger come[s] from. What are some of those boundaries you have with yourself? With family? With others? With partners? What are some of the shields that you carry? A lot of ... self-discovery [is asking], who is my community? Who is my family? What are my roots? What is my name? Who am I?"*
>
> **- Dulce Saavedra, ROC staff**

The Xinachtli and Joven Noble curricula encouraged participants to appreciate, and ideally find solace in, ancestral traditions, develop healthier relationships with those around them, and take better care of themselves (including avoiding substance abuse). Programming prompted young people to speak up and share their story in a safe space, helping shy or reluctant students to develop public speaking skills. It also trained young people to express disagreement and frustration in constructive ways, a useful skill for future activists engaging in politically contentious discussions.

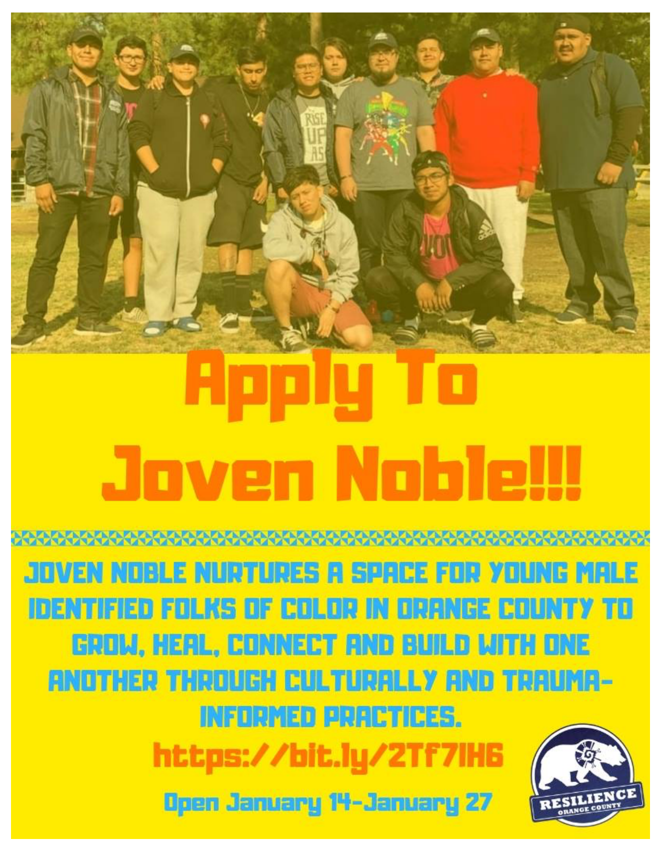
Moreover, participants were encouraged to envision a future for themselves in which they attended to their own well-being, as was as to the well-being of their families, communities, and planet. In helping them to imagine a better world, instructors oriented participants toward challenging everyday practices and institutions that undermine the well-being and dignity of themselves and of future generations. To this end, the curriculum engaged participants in community service and political action.

The Joven Noble and Xinachtli curricula specifically address the gendered concerns of young people who have been exposed to violence and the criminal justice system. Joven Noble aims to counteract gendered socialization pushing boys to be stoic, even in the face of abuse and violence (Amin, Kågesten, Adebayo et al. 2018). It supports the development of healthy masculinity, placing particular emphasis on keeping one's word, or "palabra," which includes taking responsibility for one's actions. Given that many of the young men initially involved in this program were exposed to gang violence, units include discussions on how to "learn and practice ways to express themselves with words, not violence."

The program also includes discussions on healthy relationships (including safe sex) with women and understanding and identifying the precursors to domestic violence, as well as the physical, emotional, and legal ramifications of this abuse. Importantly, Joven Noble was modified to reflect ROC's commitment to fighting homophobia, transphobia, and gender stereotyping, incorporating lessons about LGBTQ identities, gender inclusivity, and LGBTQ rights. Participants generally appreciate the program's gender focus and inclusivity.

As for the Xinachtli curriculum, it recognizes that Latina adolescents and young women growing up in high-poverty communities with gang-related problems are often the victims of violence and considered at risk for early childbearing. The curriculum includes discussions on setting physical and emotional boundaries, healthy relationships, reproductive health, and "women's human rights."

Facilitators often engage participants in discussions about sexual abuse, dating violence, and gender norms that constrain women's abilities to choose their futures. As with Joven Noble, ROC staff have modified the curriculum to be inclusive of young women of diverse sexual orientations.



Though primarily focused on well-being, Xinachtli and Joven Noble also seek to develop members' communication skills so that they can freely share their views in other ROC programs more explicitly focused on political analysis and organizing skills. Early on, young people learn the importance of sitting or standing in a circle as a means of sharing, generating meaningful dialogue, and building community. As participants took on increasing campaign responsibilities, circle communication continues, and some of the lessons learned in this introductory curriculum are incorporated in everyday programming. The following section elaborates on how healing circles and other communication and wellness strategies became ritualized practice in ROC and other groups.

"I hear a lot of men to this day be like, 'Women need to do this, women need to get married.' It's this whole patriarchal thing. As a man, you're never going to have to go through this. I don't think we're able to be in the same space because [men] are not able to relate to our pain."

- 18-year-old female

HEALING AND SELF-CARE

Participating in contentious political work can be stressful for anybody (Gorski 2019, Zavella 2020), but these stresses can be exacerbated in certain contexts. For example, ROC operates in a community where residents disproportionately experience emotional distress related to police harassment, gang violence, the hostile immigration context, and poverty. Such exposure to hardship can result in poor mental and physical health outcomes, including engaging in unhealthy or violent behaviors (Beck, Finch, Lin et al. 2014, Dowd, Palermo, Chyu et al. 2014, García 2018, Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco and Dedios-Sanguineti 2013). To mitigate against these poor health outcomes, ROC embraced indigenous or non-Western cultural interpretations of healing and other wellness practices. Their assumption is that by drawing on ethnic cultural practices, members can reconnect with their own traditions or learn about other potentially restorative traditions in their community.

To promote collective well-being, ROC has often utilized circle communication, where participants stand or sit in the circle as they take turns speaking and engaging in active listening. As a non-hierarchical form of group expression, circle communication has been used by indigenous cultures to promote shared leadership structures and address conflicts within groups (Gray and Launderdale 2007). expression, circle communication has been used by indigenous cultures to promote shared leadership structures and address conflicts within groups (Gray and Launderdale 2007). Some ROC circles have explicitly focused on healing and incorporated ceremonial-like practices, such as burning medicinal herbs like sage or copal (tree sap from the copal tree native to Mexico). Others have been more informal or impromptu circles to debrief, gauge how participants are feeling on a range of topics—from national and local issues to internal conflicts—or engage in restorative justice, that is, to discuss and repair any harms that may have occurred within the group. ROC commonly scheduled healing circles after an emotionally difficult or traumatic event, allowing youth, for example, to process the uncertainty around DACA and other immigrant rights legislation; police violence or ICE raids; broadly publicized hate speech by elected officials; and other unsettling events and political developments. In sum, ROC regularly utilized healing circles to help young people make sense of violence, injustice, or uncertainty that directly or indirectly impacts their communities.

Participants in the Girls and Women of Color Initiative attend a play on female empowerment.

We would teach them strategies that they could explore when they have that anxiety or stress. If we're going to engage youth in advocacy or systems change, we need them to be resilient because otherwise, some of the youth will burn out or become involved in some unhealthy coping mechanisms."

- Abraham Medina, Founding Executive Director, ROC

In interviews, ROC youth members shared that circles prompted them to reflect on their gendered experiences, to process hardship and difficult emotions, and to find catharsis in a collective environment. These carefully facilitated circle conversations also strengthened support networks among members. As is the case with other activities that build strong affective and prosocial ties, ROC's circle activities likely served as a protective force for youth dealing with hostile political and social environments.

"It helps you and it helps others because we would debrief in a circle. And we would just let it all out. It's basically just trying to get out whatever that's bothering you, whatever hurts you, and not just saying It doesn't matter.'

- 18-year-old male

"I think it's really important to have that separate space for male-identified and female-identified folks who don't have the same struggle. We don't go through the same thing. There's different levels of struggle and pain, and I feel like male-identified folks are more privileged than women-identified folks."

– 17-year-old female

"I think healing is building family because, personally, not having blood family here [in Orange County] is rough because I felt willing to sit in a circle, and they were willing to express how they'd been feeling, and I think for me it's been enough."

– 19-year-old female

ROC programming included other activities to enhance members' well-being. Members explored self-care through guided meditation, mindfulness, or breathing exercises, which can reduce stress and enhance physical or mental health (Busch, Magerl, Kern et al. 2012, Monk-Turner 2003, Perciavalle, Blandini, Fecarotta et al. 2017, Tan 2016). On occasion, youth were invited to decompress through recreational activities, arts and crafts, and emotion-sharing exercises. Health was also emphasized through discussions of traditional ethnic and cultural herbs, medicines, and diets. ROC staff understood that these wellness practices help mitigate against poor health outcomes and prevent burnout among young organizers, but they did not view them as a substitute for the professional help that some youth need given the multiple stressors they often face.

ROC staff and Youth Network with their community altar at Santa Ana's annual Day of the Dead event.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

ROC provided members with important skills for resolving situations when misunderstandings, tensions, miscommunication, disrespect, or other forms of harm occur among members. To this end, the group applied principles of restorative justice to their healing circles. Initially based on indigenous traditions of conflict resolution, restorative justice consists of a deliberative process that involves offenders, victims, and other community members in efforts to resolve crimes and conflicts (Beck 2012). Now widely adopted around the globe as a means of addressing juvenile delinquency and school misbehavior, the process replaces courts or formal school disciplinary procedures with practices aiming to repair harms, build community, and improve relationships (Bazemore 2001). ROC used healing circles to clear the air among participants while insisting on consequences for the harm doer, thus teaching members how to address conflict in a constructive way, especially important when members have a history of physical altercations. Interviews suggest that ROC's members learned how to apply restorative justice techniques to everyday problems, thus strengthening their relationships with peers and family members.

"This last summer they held me accountable in a very transformative way. We sat in a circle. They shared what they felt and how they'd been feeling. It was very beautiful to me. They could have just called me out on social media and made a big scene, easily. But no, they were willing to sit in a circle, and they were willing to express how they'd been feeling, and I think for me it's been enough."

– 19-year-old female

ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS

On occasion, ROC also provided members with additional targeted supports that aided them in their transition to adulthood. For example, ROC staff encouraged their members to prioritize their education and develop plans for ongoing learning after high school. To this end, ROC has coordinated volunteers to provide academic tutoring. Additionally, staff and volunteers also provided formal and informal workshops on preparing for college. Cognizant of the large undocumented youth population, ROC also offered a series of workshops focused on DACA, AB540, the California DREAM Act, and immigrant rights.

CONSCIOUSNESS-BUILDING THROUGH A CRITICAL CIVICS EDUCATION

ROC sponsored a series of political education trainings that familiarized members with issues of identity, power, and privilege, deepening their analysis of social issues affecting their communities. Incorporating over 35 workshops and related activities, ROC's curricula took an intersectional approach, encouraging young people to think about their own multiple identities, as well as power, inequality, and inclusivity in discussions of political action.

In interviews, youth members typically shared that they found these trainings eye-opening, often lamenting that similar education is not offered in school. They also indicated that these workshops and activities motivated them to help improve their community. At times facilitated by more experienced youth members, workshops were organized along the following themes:

PEOPLE POWER

“People Power” was an introductory 10-week workshop series designed to raise participants’ awareness of the histories of racialized minorities in the United States and expose them to broader structural forces inhibiting their success and well-being. Lessons politicized young people by introducing them to ethnic studies and a structural understanding of social inequalities.

Participants received an introductory overview of the experiences of racialized groups in the United States. Through interactive activities and brief readings, workshops covered key moments in Latinx, Black, Native American, and Asian American history in Santa Ana and Orange County. Additional lessons included activities focused on broader Black Civil Rights struggles in the United States. Reflecting ROC’s intersectional approach, the curriculum incorporated readings and videos featuring the racial justice efforts of Black women and LGBTQ leaders. Lessons on Latinx history offered a concise overview of U.S. interventions in Mexico, Central America, and South America, while also featuring Latinx-led efforts to address injustices in the United States, Mexico, and elsewhere. ROC’s “People Power” workshop series also defined complex concepts like white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism and aided participants in understanding the links among different forms of oppression.

Furthermore, the “People Power” curriculum offered members a general overview of policies that criminalize immigrants and young people. Lessons helped young members begin to understand how immigration laws have contributed to the large undocumented population in the United States. They also learned about how the “war on drugs,” tough-on-crime policies, and school policing contribute to the criminalization of immigrants, young people of color, and African-Americans in particular. Given the group’s largely immigrant membership, participants also received a lesson on contemporary immigration policies.

A final lesson, “Transformative Justice,” encouraged participants to reimagine institutions and systems in ways that would help their own community thrive. The goal was to convince members that they could play a role in fighting injustices and violence in their communities by organizing for institutional changes that center human rights. Ultimately, the “People Power” training workshop series provided participants with a structural understanding of racial and other inequalities while inspiring them to build on prior organizational efforts by women, LGBTQ leaders, immigrant groups, and people of color. Throughout this curriculum, youth were invited to participate in ROC’s campaign activities as well, although they were not yet expected to assume leadership roles.

Youth participating in a “People Power” activity.

"In our curriculum we talk about intersectionality. We raise consciousness about different identities and intersecting oppressions, and we talk about how different systems intersect, like … the criminal justice system and immigration systems. We also ask, 'How do these systems affect LGBTQ?'"

– Roberto, ROC staff

MUJERES EN RESISTENCIA

Mujeres en Resistencia was a consciousness-raising program targeting "women and femme-identified" young people, including cis-gender, transgender, and non-binary youth. Attended mostly by Santa Ana high school students, workshops introduced members to the history of feminism and intersectional feminism that has addressed various forms of social inequality experienced by immigrant and young women of color, including trans immigrant women. Targeting its 1.5- and second-generation audience, the training included readings and activities on why women migrate; what their experiences are like; and the challenges, criminalization, and violence femme-identified migrants sometimes face as they undertake their journey from Mexico, Central America, Asia, and other parts of the world. In seeking to bolster the community engagement and political voices of the participants, Mujeres in Resistencia also incorporated sessions on women's leadership and encouraged participants to build a support network.

YOUTH JUSTICE

On various occasions, ROC offered more detailed workshops on criminal justice issues. These included trainings on the development of the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems; the funding of criminal justice systems; Miranda rights and voting rights of formerly incarcerated individuals; restorative justice as an alternative to punitive approaches; key federal and California laws; and policies that apply to the criminalization of youth and immigrants. The trainings also included overviews of policy advocacy and grassroots efforts that could reduce the high rates of incarceration and deportation of community members, such as holding district attorneys accountable, school discipline policy reforms, and restorative justice

"At ROC, I got the knowledge that nobody ever taught me growing up, like know your rights with police officers, immigration officers, law enforcement in general."

– 18-year-old male

VOTING RIGHTS

Leading up to election seasons, members were invited to participate in a voting rights training program. Here, youth learned that voting rights were initially only intended for white men with property. They then discovered how various groups—including racial minorities, women, younger adults, and formerly incarcerated individuals—have fought for the right to vote. Throughout the program, members discussed how voting matters for issues relevant to their lives, such as immigration, education, criminal justice, gun control, and the environment. Additionally, organizers—often noncitizen immigrants themselves—emphasized the power of immigrants and minors to get out the vote and ensure that eligible voters exercise their right. Ultimately, the program sought to instill in members a deep commitment to and excitement about getting out the vote.

"I've learned to be patient with things that are going on, and I know that the change is going to come, that change will come. I've learned to be hopeful for everything that we do here, for everything that we fight for."

– 16-year-old female

CIVIC ACTION

ROC's programming provided youth members opportunities to gain grassroots organizing experience. Youth who attended ROC's "People Power" and other workshop series were regularly invited to participate in committees responsible for implementing campaigns and other community outreach. Members also joined the Youth Network, which urged local government agencies to invest in youth development and restorative justice rather than in policies that criminalize youth. In the months leading up to an election, youth members were also invited to educate and mobilize voters.

Through ROC's civic action groups, members developed a range of civic skills. For example, they improved their ability to run meetings, communicate effectively, speak in public, and plan events and activities. As they engaged in campaigns, members learned how to have productive meetings with decision-makers, negotiate with diverse community stakeholders, develop political strategies, implement organizing tactics, educate broad audiences, and mobilize community members.

Through this work youth members increased public consciousness about their concerns and publicized possible solutions to community problems. Occasionally in concert with coalitional efforts, young members claimed some important campaign victories. The following section lists some of ROC's most important grassroots organizing and civic engagement victories.

"When we were in middle school, the older youth led the meetings, and we just contributed to them. But now, we're becoming young adults and getting older. The older youth started to ask if we wanted to facilitate meetings, and that built our leadership and our confidence in organizing. It was just a long process. Back then, I was really shy and I wouldn't want to talk to people, but they pushed me out of my comfort zone, and now I'm comfortable speaking in large spaces at times."

– 15-year-old male

CAMPAIGN WINS SINCE 2016

During its initial years, ROC was at the forefront of campaigns seeking to dismantle the school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline, enhance institutional accountability to youth and immigrants, and increase youth voice in government elections. The group's initial successes helped define debates around youth issues in Santa Ana and Orange County more broadly. Their groundbreaking efforts have included the following victories:

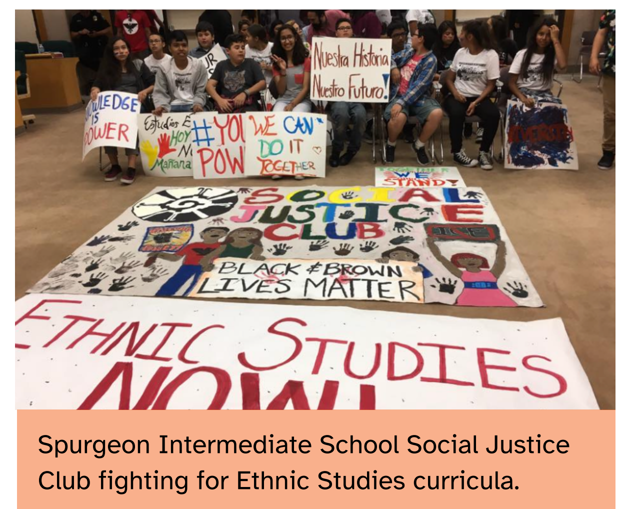
SCHOOL CLIMATE

ROC's founding staff chose to address school discipline concerns in their campaigns because they were keenly aware of the close cooperation among schools, the Orange County Probation Department, and ICE. Young leaders knew of individual cases where disciplined students who

were referred to school and city police were subsequently detained by ICE. Therefore, they focused their efforts on the “school-to-prison” portion of the deportation pipeline. Prior to establishing ROC, the group’s founders argued for more rehabilitative, less punitive juvenile justice practices and school disciplinary policies. Specifically, they advocated for restorative justice models of school discipline and facilitated guided dialogues to encourage victims and offenders to develop empathy for each other and understand reasons for certain behaviors. An alternative to punitive school discipline, restorative justice seeks to repair the harm caused by the infraction, promote healing, and reduce out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

In 2014, a coalition of youth organizations that included ROC’s founders secured a $7 million commitment from the Santa Ana Unified School District to implement restorative justice programs, as well as for teacher training to address the bullying of LGBTQ and undocumented youth. These reforms sought to reduce punitive policies such as suspensions or expulsions and that can put undocumented students at risk of deportation. Funding for these new restorative justice programs was incorporated into the district’s Local Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Once ROC was established, staff and young leaders monitored the implementation of the district’s restorative justice programs. Young leaders soon realized that the community’s demands were being implemented unevenly. Therefore, ROC renewed its campaign in 2016. Armed with information about school budgets and student input, ROC members (alongside other leaders) testified in front of the school board, both praising and criticizing the district’s



Spurgeon Intermediate School Social Justice Club fighting for Ethnic Studies curricula.

implementation of disciplinary reforms. The coalition successfully advocated for the ongoing funding and expansion of these programs for the 2017-20 school years. Through this campaign, ROC’s young leaders learned that generally, achieving a policy win is only the first step; it is also important to monitor the implementation of new programs and continue to pressure local institutions to follow through on community demands.

SANCTUARY CITY

After Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 presidential election, youth leaders felt that it was important to do as much as they could to protect their communities. To this end, they joined with local allies to urge Santa Ana to adopt a “sanctuary city” status. “Sanctuary” is a term used to represent a broad range of practices aiming to protect the well-being of immigrants, prevent their deportation, and shield them from violent or unsafe border conditions. Cities that adopt such a status typically limit local cooperation with federal immigration law enforcement, affirm the presence and rights of migrants and refugees, and in some cases protect or increase immigrant access to municipal services (Jeffries and Ridgley 2020).

Notably, 2016 was not the first time that community groups advocated for sanctuary status. In June 2007, the seeds of another sanctuary campaign sprouted when 175 undocumented immigrants were rounded up in Orange County as part of an immigration sweep. According to the OC Register, while some council members signaled support for the immigrants—at least in principle—none committed to pursuing the sanctuary designation. One councilmember, Sal Tinajero, was quoted as saying, "It's a radical proposal for Orange County," also expressing concern about the potential backlash. Meanwhile, another councilmember, Michele Martinez, claimed, "Most of the council thinks sanctuary is not going to do anything [to stop the sweeps], so why even do it?" (OC Register 2007).

Nearly a decade later, the Santa Ana City Council's position had changed thanks to the ongoing organizing efforts of youth and immigrant rights groups. In a December 6, 2016, council meeting, ROC was part of a youth and community coalition that convinced city council members to vote 5-0 to adopt a sanctuary resolution, making Santa Ana the first and only sanctuary city in Orange County at the time. This resolution largely reaffirmed the city's commitment to serve all residents (regardless of immigration status), prevent biased policing, and protect sensitive information (such as residents' citizenship and legal status).

It also established an oversight task force, though it lacking enforcement mechanisms. As a result, ROC and their allies recognized that while this resolution made a symbolic gesture toward creating a welcoming environment for immigrants, it lacked the power to change the on-the-ground reality (Jeffries and Ridgely 2020). They therefore continued to pressure the

ROC staff at a panel in support for sanctuary cities throughout California.

city council to further demonstrate their support for immigrant rights.

On December 20, 2016, two weeks after the resolution vote, the city council unanimously approved the sanctuary ordinance, which prohibited the use of city resources for immigration enforcement and directed law enforcement to exercise discretion by citing and releasing individuals instead of detaining them for ICE. Importantly, the ordinance established a community task force to oversee its implementation, giving it more teeth than the resolution (Sarmiento 2017).

Activists' commitment to sanctuary contributed to the termination of an ICE contract allowing undocumented immigrants to be detained in the Santa Ana Jail (Sarmiento 2020). It also led to the establishment of the Deportation Defense Program, which provided crucial support for immigrants in detention centers or involved in removal proceedings. In addition to other allies, a key partner in this effort was VeLA (Vecinos de Lacy), a resident group based in Lacy, a densely populated Santa Ana neighborhood, that sought to

secure legal representation for immigrant residents facing deportation (Sarmiento 2017). In response to grassroots efforts, the Vera Institute of Justice (a New York City-based non-profit) and the City of Santa Ana offered initial funding for the Deportation Defense Program in 2017. Grassroots advocates continued to pressure the city to invest in the successful program, securing ongoing and increased funding. In June 2018, the city committed $80,000 in funding for the program. This number increased annually, so that by June 2021, the Santa Ana City Council had voted to raise funding to $300,000.

ROC and its collaborators celebrated this victory after years of advocacy around the program, which represents a long-term city commitment to its immigrant residents. All told, the sanctuary campaign was a resounding success. Unlike most other "sanctuary cities" in California, Santa Ana is unique in that it has provided tangible resources for immigrants as part of the city's stated commitment to equitably serving them (García 2019, Sarmiento 2020).

INVEST IN YOUTH

ROC also participated in Invest in Youth, a collective that initially included Latino Health Access, Project Kinship, The Center OC, and Santa Ana Unidos. The group began meeting to develop collective demands for how the city should restructure the budget to better support youths' emotional and physical well-being. Leaders believed that youth programming could prevent young people from joining gangs, improve their performance in school, and help them become community leaders. Their initial 2017 demand that the city set aside a portion of the city budget for youth programming and reduce the police budget failed. However, upon learning that the City of Santa Ana would receive tax benefits from newly legal cannabis sales, they changed their strategy, demanding half of the city's revenue from that windfall.

Invest in Youth declared victory in Summer 2018 when the city granted one-third of its $9.3 million cannabis tax fund to youth-related investments. However, the youthful coalition soon learned that they needed to be more specific in their demands, as the city did not spend the earmarked funds as the coalition had hoped.

GETTING OUT THE YOUNG LATINX VOTE IN ORANGE COUNTY

Soon after its founding, ROC became involved in a statewide network to conduct electoral outreach and get young voters to the polls. They joined what eventually became Power California, where staff received training on how to systematically carry out and track young voter outreach. As ROC did not have much prior experience with this engagement strategy, members benefited from ongoing coaching and mentorship from Power California's staff. Notably, ROC's voter engagement efforts largely involved targeting the children of immigrants, some of whom were noncitizens. With many noncitizens among their ranks and in their own families, young leaders believed that it was important to increase turnout among Latinx young adult citizens who were eligible to vote and could advocate on behalf of immigrants.

More broadly, ROC emphasized the importance of voting and increasing young people's commitment to getting out the vote. Even if members could not vote themselves because they were under the age of 18 or noncitizens, they learned how to enhance democratic representation in their communities by educating voters about the process through voter registration, voter education, and phone banking.

ROC's get-out-the-vote advocacy aligns with the approach of progressive groups in California and beyond. Often referred to as Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE), this approach blends traditional grassroots organizing and proven voter outreach strategies to build the capacity of local leaders to exercise political power. IVE is distinct from traditional political party campaigns that temporarily sweep into the community during election seasons (Garcia Bedolla and Michelson 2012). They hire temporary staff to get out the vote and then close their operations after the election. IVE, by contrast, trains existing community members in effective strategies to reach voters consistently and further expand their leadership capacities.

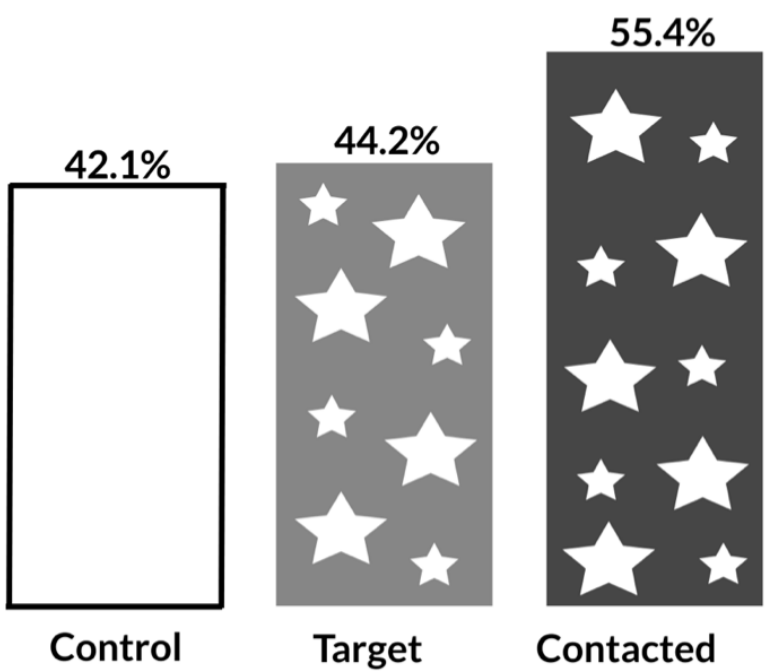
Through its collaboration with Power California, ROC was well-positioned to enlist young members in its 2016 and 2018 voter outreach efforts. Participating in non-partisan voter registration also helped strengthen ROC's relationships with some school administrators, since this form of civic engagement was not as politically charged as ROC's immigrant rights work and didn't invite the same vocal opposition. Moreover, non-partisan voter registration on high school campuses has been encouraged by the 2014 Assembly Bill 1817 (designating voter registration weeks) and Senate Bill 113 (allowing for pre-registration of 16 and 17-year-olds). ROC leaders could thus regularly secure classrooms at all the county's high schools, where they conducted voter registration and offered voter registration and offered voter education presentations informed by an intersectional analysis. Specifically, their training workshop focused on how women, African-Americans, and undocumented immigrants have been or continue to be denied the right to vote. Given this situation, youth presenters explained to students, voting and ongoing organizers are necessary strategies for advancing the rights and needs of the marginalized.

As for the outreach itself, around election season (and prior to the pandemic), ROC's office was typically crowded with 6-8 young people using cell phones and computers to call young adult Latinx voters in Orange County. Members of YGEN, one of ROC's organizing committees, received intensive training. In addition to ensuring that they were well versed in conveying the importance of voting for diverse populations, ROC also made sure that members were prepared to speak to different segments of the population (i.e., college students, non-college students, naturalized citizens, those with a criminal record who were newly eligible to vote, etc.) ROC engaged in a nonpartisan effort that did not endorse political candidates. They used an online service, Political Data Inc., which provided them with a list of phone numbers in the area and posted an agreed-upon script that typically focused on increasing youth representation among the electorate. Volunteers would then track responses to the questions.

Contacting voters by telephone can be tedious and challenging work (Garcia Bedolla and Michelson 2012). According to volunteers, most youth are accustomed to texting, and they tend to avoid answering calls from unfamiliar numbers. Nonetheless, these calls have had an extraordinary impact on voter turnout, as measured by an experiment conducted during the 2018 election. The study compared voter turnout between a randomly selected "control group" of voters aged 18-34 who were not targeted for outreach with voter of the same age who received an informative phone call. Recognizing that there were efforts by partisan political campaigns to get out the vote during this election season, this experiment measure the "added value" of the non-partisan youth-led efforts. The results show that compared to the control group's 42.1% predicted turnout, those targeted for outreach (whether or not they answered the phone averaged a predicted turnout

(rate of 44.2%. In other words, voter engagement efforts increased overall turnout among young Latinx Orange County voters by an estimated 2.1 percentage points. Given that most young people primarily use phones to text, 13.8% of youth who were called answered the phone. Yet impressively, contacted youth averaged a turnout rate of 55.4%. This means that peer-initiated phone conversations resulted in an estimated 13.3% increase in turnout. Results suggest that when ROC members spoke to young voters on the phone, they made a convincing case for voting. In considering these results, it is worth noting that there were competitive congressional campaigns that turned out more voters than usual. Regardless, it is evident that coalitional efforts, including ROC's nonpartisan work to get out the young Latinx vote, also made a difference in turnout. In 2020, ROC remained engaged in electoral efforts, but to a smaller degree given competing demands and stresses during the pandemic and nationwide racial uprisings.

Notably, ROC's youth leadership de-velopment programming enabled them to mobilize young voters beyond the city of Santa Ana, thus expanding their reach. Moreover, other coalitional actions have begun providing members with the networks and policy advocacy experience to exert a broader regional influence as well.



A LASTING IMPACT IN SANTA ANA

As the pandemic subsided, ROC shifted gears towards more resident-driven organizing while maintaining some youth programming. Responding to a changing political landscape, local demands, and staffing changes, the organization broadened its scope to include municipalities outside of Santa Ana.

As the organization continues to evolve, it is important to honor and recognize its early successes. In the mid-to-late 2010s, ROC was at the forefront of fighting the school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline, achieving significant local policy victories and raising public consciousness in Santa Ana's conservative political climate. Additionally, the organization was central to the establishment of Santa Ana as a sanctuary city, successfully pressured the city to fund a deportation defense program, and increased turnout among young voters. The organization's efforts have also altered local dynamics so that immigrants have a greater voice in defining the trajectories of their communities. Finally, and perhaps just as importantly, it engaged young members in programming that gave them lifelong civic and leadership skills. Consequently, ROC's former youth members are likely to continue participating in efforts to uplift their community and engage voters. As ROC proceeds with its work, its will draw on the youth leaders it has developed as well as on its deep networks to advance its mission and goals.

Spurgeon Intermediate students leading the Youth In Resistance Conference.

APPENDIX: PRIOR CAMPAIGNS RAIZ AND SABMOC VICTORIES

Before establishing ROC, the founders had gained valuable campaign experience and secured some notable victories. Deeply aware of how the criminal justice system and immigration laws upended the dreams of youth and other residents, the founding members and their allies immersed themselves in immigrant rights and criminal justice issues, developed ties with allies, and acquired concrete experience advocating for policy change at different levels of government. They learned how to navigate complex policies across overlapping government jurisdictions and passed along this hands-on experience to younger residents of their community. The below lists some of the campaigns future ROC leaders worked on after the passage of the California Dream Act 2011. These young leaders then brought their experience to ROC, engaging the next cohort of young people in fighting the criminalization of immigrants and holding institutions accountable.

ENDING RACIAL PROFILING AT DUI CHECKPOINTS

Their early efforts included fighting against discriminatory DUI checkpoints across Santa Ana and other Latinx neighborhoods. At these checkpoints, police authorities would stop commuters to check driver's licenses and to impound the cars of drivers—mostly undocumented immigrants—who could not provide one. Police also detained individuals with existing arrest warrants. As a result, undocumented immigrants grew afraid to leave their homes for fear of encountering law enforcement on the roads. In an effort to publi-

cize the location of these checkpoints and warn people, young activists joined the Orange County May Day Coalition, which included staff from El Centro Cultural de México, Copwatch (an informal network of activists that monitor police activity to identify potential misconduct), and the Orange County Congregation Community Organization (OCCCO), a faith-based group, among other grassroots organizations. Claudia Perez, RAIZ member and eventual ROC Executive Director (following Abraham Medina's departure to graduate school), was 17 years old at the time and recalls how this early organizing effort occurred before everyone was connected through social media: "Everything happened via text. We'd try to do our best to text out like, 'Hey, there's going to be a checkpoint.'" Additionally, activists sought to reach the broader community: "We were also standing at the checkpoints. So, if we knew there was going to be a checkpoint on a particular date, we would get together the day before and create signs that would say 'Checkpoint Ahead,' and we would stand like one or two lights ahead ... letting folks know like, 'Hey ... there's a checkpoint coming up. Turn around if you don't have your license or documents. Turn around. You might get your vehicle impounded."

Youth leaders and their allies soon realized that despite the creativity and dedication of the sign makers, their efforts were unsustainable. Claudia explained that they thus had to shift tactics**:**

First, the checkpoints happen in the same immigrant community during rush hour. So, let's shine light on that. Second, after folks are stopped and if they don't have a license—which was the case for undocumented folks back then before AB 60 [the bill granting undocumented immigrants access to a driver's license]—they get their cars impounded. They're not even given the chance to be able to call somebody with a license to come pick up their car. So, we need to do something about it.

In response, youth activists and their allies urged the city council to end the checkpoints and the impounding of cars. They faced opposition from council members who, according to Claudia, suggested "immigrants were criminals because they're driving without a license." While the coalition did not put an end to the checkpoints, the youth could claim to have won a partial victory. Under the new policy devised after the public pressure, Claudia explained, "If immigrants were caught driving without a license, they would have the option to call somebody with a license to come and pick up their vehicle within 30 minutes." This change went into effect October 1, 2011, and was then reinforced by a state law that prevented working immigrants from having their vehicles impounded at DUI checkpoints, effective January 1, 2012 (Cisneros 2012). These policies prevented hundreds of immigrants from losing their cars at checkpoints that were supposedly intended to identify drunk drivers.

While young leaders did not achieve their initial goal of altogether ending DUI checkpoints that were disproportionately occurring in Latinx communities, their partial victories showed them that change can be affected, albeit incrementally, and emboldened them to broaden their efforts. As Claudia noted, "At that moment, we were like, wow, it is possible to fight for something and really meet in the middle. We can work in a coalition space to talk to city council and be able to impact some of these policies that hurt our communities. We were really pumped after that, and we asked ourselves, 'What is next? What are we holding dear to our heart that we want to work on?'"

REDUCING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE POLICE AND ICE

ROC's founders next urged Orange County to take more concrete steps to dismantle the school-to-prison-to deportation pipeline, an effort that required appealing to multiple government jurisdictions. In collaboration with the ACLU and other community partners, RAIZ and SABMOC obtained data showing the high rates of deportations of young people. The Orange County Probation Department (OCPD) referred nearly 700 youth to ICE between 2009 and 2013, accounting for 43% of California's total ICE deportation holds on minors (Teji 2013). According to American Community Survey data, just under 10% of noncitizen 12-17-year-olds in California lived in Orange County during this time period, evidencing the area's disproportionately aggressive approach to immigration enforcement.

Armed with statistics and a better understanding of decision-making processes, youth leaders used several strategies to try to eliminate cooperation between OCPD and ICE. They participated in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, a project funded by the Annie Casey Foundation that brought together members of the Orange County Probations Department (OCPD), social service agencies, educators, and community members with the goal of reducing juvenile incarceration. They raised awareness about the school-to-prison-to deportation pipeline through forums in schools, churches, and community centers; took part in May Day marches and other demonstrations; and engaged in arts-based activism. SABMOC and RAIZ leaders organized meetings with elected officials at multiple levels of government to pressure OCPD to terminate their collaboration with ICE. Adolescent members of these organizations also attended these meetings. As fa result of these efforts, in November 2012, OCPD reported that it would no longer refer youth who had committed low-level offenses to ICE. However, under OCPD's updated policy on juveniles, it would continue to provide immigration authorities with the names of any undocumented young person who "presents a foreseeable and/or articulated danger to public safety," or when "[r]eporting the minor's immigration status serves the best interests of the minor" (Orange County Probation Department 2012). The number of young people referred to ICE decreased under this policy, but officers still had the discretionary power to make ICE referrals (Anderson, Buatti, Martin et al. 2013). Youth were encouraged by these gains but determined to continue their efforts to sever the pipeline. This work targeted a key source of the problem: school disciplinary policies.

Moving forward several years to March 2014, Abraham Medina (SABMOC), Carlos Perea (RAIZ), and a Santa Ana teacher, Benjamin Vazquez, raised the pipeline issue directly with the federal government. The three were invited as part of a delegation to Washington, D.C., to participate in a town hall meeting with President Obama on the Affordable Care Act. Preceding the event, they met with congressional representatives to educate them about the prison-to-deportation pipeline.

Then, while taking a picture with the president at the town hall on March 7, Vazquez confronted him, asking why so many youths were deported in Orange County. According to Vasquez, Obama's unsatisfactory response was, "It's a Republican county." During the brief encounter, Vasquez managed to hand Obama's staff a packet of materials containing a poem Abraham had written about the deportations and information on Orange County's juvenile detentions and deportations (Molina, March 8, 2014). Days later, on March 14, Obama ordered a federal review of

deportations (NPR 2014). As such, Vazquez and the Santa Ana youth organizers felt like they had contributed to the national campaign to pressure Obama into confronting high deportation rates across the country. However, the federal review of the deportation process did not result in any immediate changes to the ways in which the OC Probation department referred juveniles to ICE.

Given the ongoing deportations of immigrant youth, Santa Ana's young leaders decided to pursue a new approach. Joining a statewide coalition of lawyers, advocates, and community representatives, youth organizers met with Sacramento state senators to push for the passage of AB 899. Approved in September 2015, this bill sought "to clarify that juvenile court records should remain confidential regardless of the juvenile's immigration status" (CA AB 899, 2015). It prohibited the sharing of a minor's immigration status with or by federal immigration officials without a court order. By preventing the OC Probation Department from identifying undocumented youth for ICE referrals, AB 899 nearly severed the "prison-to-deportation" portion of the pipeline that was diverting the paths of undocumented adolescents in California's juvenile detention system.

DEMANDING ETHNIC STUDIES

RAIZ staff engaged students at Spurgeon Middle School to push for the adoption of Ethnic Studies coursework at the high school level. Student participants in the program were inspired by the Xinachtli and Joven Noble curriculum and its insights into their history. With support from their organizers and teacher Mike Rodriguez, youth attended school district meetings to weigh in on the curriculum's subject matter, implementation, and teacher training. In March 2015, the Santa Ana Unified School District approved an Ethnic Studies elective as part of the Social Studies curriculum. While this would not be a required course—as the students had initially called for—the addition of the class was still a victory. Subsequently, in the wake of the racial justice protests of 2020, the school district approved a youth- and community-backed effort to make Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement for the class entering high school in 2022-23. The state of California has mandated that Ethnic Studies become a high school graduation requirement by the 2029-30 school year. RAIZ's important victory has vaulted Santa Ana to the forefront in developing and implementing Ethnic Studies curricula.

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