COMMUNITY COALITION’S 2020-21 IMPACT STATEMENT

MAKING SURE THE PEOPLE WERE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC
Community Coalition was founded in 1990 by now-Congressmember Karen Bass in response to the crack-cocaine epidemic that devastated South Los Angeles (South LA). In the face of a public health crisis that was primarily met with harmful law enforcement policies, CoCo was created as a vehicle for African American and Latinx youth and families in South LA—those most directly impacted—to become change agents and address the root causes of the inequities experienced in their community.

CoCo’s mission is to help transform the social and economic conditions in South LA that foster addiction, crime, violence and poverty by building a community institution capable of involving thousands in creating, influencing and changing public policy. For three decades, Community Coalition has been at the forefront of the fight to build a stronger social safety net and reform systems pertinent to quality of life outcomes, such as public education and criminal justice.

Understanding the material impact that the COVID-19 pandemic was going to have on South LA, CoCo reached out to hundreds of youth and families to understand their needs and develop strategies to help. Residents told us about their inability to connect to broadband and lack of technology that made distance learning and virtual classrooms impossible. Additionally, many of our families are part of the service-sector, so working from home was not an option. They lost their jobs and immediately became unable to meet basic needs including food and rent.

Families suffered from anxiety, fear and isolation. To provide some relief to families, we quickly constructed a “mutual aid network” and established partnerships with Los Angeles Council District 8, Black Entertainment Television/United Way of Greater Los Angeles, LAUSD, local African American and Latinx-owned restaurants as well as other philanthropists and community-based organizations (i.e. Brotherhood Crusade and Community Build) to help launch much-needed intervention efforts that helped to keep people sheltered in place.

Since March 16, CoCo has delivered water, sanitizing supplies, paper towels and toilet paper to its members. We have also distributed more than 23,000 pieces of PPE. Additionally, Community Coalition connected 2,000 South Los Angeles senior residents to hot meal programs and provided $525,000 in direct relief (including assistance for rent/mortgage, utilities and food).
DEFINING VACCINE EQUITY IN ACTION

By COREY MATTHEWS
Chief Operating Officer, Community Coalition

Community Coalition (CoCo) and other community-based organizations stepped up. We got involved in the fight for vaccine equity because our community members deserved vaccines from which they were systematically being excluded from due to technological divides, scattered communication, clunky registration processes, and unfair policing of “eligibility.” Making matters worse was South L.A.'s invasion of the “vaccine chasers”—predominantly younger white folks with the time and resources to travel across L.A. County in search of leftover vaccines. They were laissez-faire slapped on the wrist for not meeting eligibility requirements, but they were not turned away from vaccine doses, and no one ever pointed to why there were leftover vaccines in the first place.

Equity would have meant that anyone who has to go into work, especially in an hourly wage environment, would have been deemed “essential” to be vaccinated. From a community-wide perspective, not many of us are in employment sectors that shifted to remote and virtual work. The ability to do so provided another layer of protection and exposure to coronavirus. But what about families living in multi-generational households? Those caring for 65+ elders should have also been eligible for vaccination because they still had to go into the workplace every day.

The eligibility criteria were set to defined and specific categories which left communities of color out. Moreover, vaccine sites that run during the day without evening appointments or weekend opportunities put working adults and their families in a bind—miss the vaccination appointment or miss their paycheck. That certainly didn’t feel like equity.

In partnership with Charles Drew University, Community Coalition provided support to a multilevel government effort which vaccinated 4,478 Black and Brown South Los Angeles residents at Jesse Owens Park in a two-week period. As CoCo and other groups received opportunities to coordinate with officials, we needed to be empowered to communicate in ways that resonated with our community. We also needed to be equipped with the right type of information to ensure: 1) seamless registration processes, 2) that the hours of operation for vaccine sites supported those with limited child and elder care options and 3) that those with jobs which do not provide the flexibility to be paid while waiting in line for a vaccine also had access to appointments.

If we want to continue to elevate equity as the public health frame, let’s make sure we continue to get the vaccines to communities that bore the brunt of the pandemic. That’s equity in action.
In May 2021, Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified) Board members voted affirmatively 6-1 to distribute an additional $700 million in the 2021-22 academic year to schools using the Student Equity Needs Index (SENI). The SENI is a formula used to inform the allocation of funds so that LA Unified can efficiently address the achievement gap. Passage of Board Member Monica Garcia’s “Equity is Justice 2021” resolution means all LA Unified students across the district will benefit from these dollars, and LA’s high and highest-need schools will have increased access to essential resources that level the academic playing field.

This $700 million investment sends a strong message of hope to our scholars while demonstrating the Board’s commitment to the educational equity we need to keep building. We look forward to working with the Board and LA Unified to keep this momentum going so that we can rectify generations of divestment faced by communities of color and provide every LAUSD student with the quality education they deserve.

In school year 2020-21, the district invested only $282 million through SENI despite starting with a budget of approximately $9 billion. Approval of $700 million in additional funding through SENI means that the Board has more than doubled SENI allocations in one budget season, and schools serving communities like Watts, Boyle Heights, and South LA will be gaining hundreds of thousands—or in some cases millions—of additional dollars effective immediately. These funds will provide critical support for under-resourced schools, including psychiatric social workers, intervention coordinators, attendance counselors, planning time for teachers, and other vital interventions which school administrators can use to respond to the specific needs of their individual schools. It is especially gratifying to see these funds approved now so that principals have the time they need to implement critical services and supports just as schools are reopening. The added funds will immediately combat structural inequities exacerbated by COVID-19.

“We are excited about the commitment the district has made to the highest-need schools, which serve essential families who have sacrificed their health and lives to keep our city and county moving and thriving. These same families live in parts of the school district, like South LA, that for far too long have experienced disinvestment and been ignored,” states Aurea Montes-Rodriguez, Executive Vice President of Community Coalition.
When our city became the epicenter of COVID-19, our most vulnerable community members shouldered the brunt of the crisis, experiencing devastating levels of tragedy, hardship, and trauma. Our families, neighbors, and fellow Angelenos paid the price for this pandemic. We were fractured by its reach in all facets of life. Whether you are a frontline healthcare or grocery worker, educator, non-profit or small business owner—we have all been impacted.

Our members live in the hardest hit communities and work in difficult conditions that exposed them to Covid-19. Over the past year, Brotherhood Crusade, Community Coalition (CoCo), InnerCity Struggle (ICS), and SEIU 2015 directly engaged in relief efforts to help our communities through this crisis. Although community-based organizations have a huge part to play in the recovery of our communities, the government also has to play a key role in addressing the systemic inequality that the pandemic laid bare. Together, with more than 50 civic, labor, community, and civil rights groups, CoCo joined Los Angeles residents to demand that city leaders allocate the lion’s share of $1.3B in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to communities hardest hit by Covid-19.

The Making Los Angeles Whole plan centered on families, workers, businesses and youth most impacted by the pandemic, while also creating opportunities for all of Los Angeles to thrive. As the Los Angeles City Council Budget and Finance Committee put the finishing touches on Mayor Eric Garcetti’s revised 2021-22 fiscal year budget, the voices of the people were heard. $170 million in funding that was demanded by The Making Los Angeles Whole Coalition was included to address the needs of families and communities adversely affected by COVID-19.

Funding in the following areas were reflective of the Coalition’s demands:

- Deferred maintenance for Parks & Rec—$75M
- Increased funding for senior meal programs—$10M
- Increased Universal Basic Income—$5M for a total of $45M
- Funding for small businesses—$25M
- Good Food Zone and Jobs and Economic Development Incentive—(JEDI) zone $5M
- Utilities Assistance—$10M
- Broadband—$10M
- Alternative learning centers/child care—$20M
- Child care support for centers and families—$10M

In addition to the investments, the Budget & Finance committee passed a motion to adopt an Equity Index that will serve as the foundation for ensuring more equitably practices throughout City services.
Like many students looking to be accepted into a four-year college or university, Kawika Smith took advantage of the SAT training offered by his school and other nonprofits which he says just were not effective in preparing him or teaching him key test-taking strategies. In December 2019, Kawika became one of three lead plaintiffs in a coalition of students and advocacy groups that filed suit against the University of California system.

The lawsuit sought to stop the UC system from using standardized test scores in its admissions process. The plaintiffs called out the fact that college entrance tests, like the SAT and ACT, are biased against poor Black and Brown students. The accomplished student leader, who had a 3.56 GPA, and three associate degrees from L.A. Southwest College, took the SAT and was not surprised by his test scores.

“I knew my scores would not be competitive. But the SAT didn’t give a true account of my potential,” Smith said.

The lawsuit also asserted that the discriminatory tests have led to an enormous test prep industry which affords affluent students with opportunities and access to resources that allow them to perform well on college entrance exams. The UC Board of Regents voted in May 2020 to eliminate the SAT and ACT testing requirement for incoming freshman students. Critics of the testing system argued that low-income students of color and those with disabilities were disadvantaged without elite tutors or strategic test prep services. The UC system officially dropped SAT, ACT scores from use in admissions and scholarships in May of 2021. The SAT and ACT tests can still be used when considering a student for admissions in the fall of 2022, but the test will be optional.

“The idea of assessing a student’s capability or potential in college with a single standardized test never sat right with me. I only have to look as far as the details of my own life to know how complicated it is to chart a person’s future from one snapshot in time,” Smith told the Los Angeles Sentinel.
Without a doubt, the global pandemic made racial and wealth disparities worse for Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities across the nation. The data soon showed that communities of color were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Community Coalition doubled down on our power building strategies by continuing to organize digitally, coordinating mutual aid efforts throughout South Los Angeles, and continuing our efforts to close corporate tax loopholes via the Schools & Communities First campaign—which manifested as Prop 15 on the November 2020 ballot.

We renewed our commitment to working with our members to make sure South LA got its fair share of resources. Highlights included:

- 90 residents were trained to use mass phoning technology and 19,000 texts were sent to LA voters,
- Approximately 100 residents participated in deep political study related to key issues,
- Thousands of viewers were reached through our virtual forums, town halls, People First Assemblies, and PowerFest via CoCo’s digital platforms,
- More than $525,000 in mutual aid was distributed to families via support from BET/United Way,
- In partnership with Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson, CoCo launched a free senior meals program to serve 2,000 vulnerable African American and Latinx seniors daily in South LA,
- Over 500 low-income families were given laptops, and
- 23,000 PPE, hygiene and toiletry products were distributed to families in need.

Additionally, Community Coalition was highly successful in our organizing and action campaigns:

**2020**

- **Mutual Aid -- Community Coalition, Brotherhood Crusade, and InnerCity Struggle** joined forces to raise $400,000 to support 5,000 at-risk South and East Los Angeles students with technology and emergency needs at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CoCo wins one of four $500K LA City Great Streets Challenge grants to build the People’s Plaza on Manchester and Vermont.
- The LA County Board of Supervisors voted to end the collection of criminal administrative fees. $1.8 billion in previously assessed fees were discharged.
- **Measure J** passes requiring 10% of unrestricted county funds—between $360M and $900M annually—be spent on investments in communities disproportionally harmed by racism.

**2021**

- **“SENI 2.0 Equity is Justice”** campaign garnered an additional $700 million to schools using the Student Equity Needs Index for 2021-22 academic year.
- $170 million in funding that was demanded by The Making Los Angeles Whole Coalition was included in the City Council’s final budget for 2021-2022 to address the needs of families and communities adversely affected by COVID-19.
- CoCo vaccinated 4,478 Black and Brown at Jesse Owens Park in a two-week period.
- The UC System officially drops SAT and ACT scores from use in admissions and scholarships.
COMMUNITY HEALING

Community Coalition (CoCo) partnered with WE RISE, an LA County initiative, to create “Culture Cures/Cultura Cura.” The installation was an eight-day altar program that invited LA County residents to collectively heal from the social, emotional and mental stresses caused by the pandemic. Mental healthcare professionals say many people saw their emotional health deteriorate over the last year. The CDC says from August 2020 to February 2021, the number of people reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression rose from 36% to 42%.

Those reporting unmet mental health care needs rose from 9% to 12%. Increases were the largest among adults ages 18 to 29. Studies show COVID fears and social restrictions had a negative impact on the mental health of teens, those between the ages of 13 and 19. According to the C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health at Michigan Medicine, one in three girls and one in five teen boys experienced new or worsening anxiety.

WE RISE encourages well-being and healing through art, connection, community engagement and creative expression. CoCo’s week-long event included mental health and wellbeing activities like sound baths, yoga sessions, and healing circles in addition to a gospel choir, Aztec dancers, mural making and more. “The COVID-19 pandemic, its associated trauma and loss, the economic hardships it created, and the racial injustice that continues to impact communities across LA County are all things from which BIPOC communities need to collectively heal. All inequities were exacerbated by COVID—including food insecurity, wealth inequality, and the digital divide. Art and connection are ways we can start to move forward” explains Glauz Diego, Director of Arts & Culture at Community Coalition.