

BACKGROUND

- Latino/a youth experience disproportionately high stress, depression, and anxiety due to social drivers of health and limited culturally aligned mental-health services.
- Adolescence is a key developmental period, yet Latino/a youth remain underserved in traditional mental-health settings.

OBJECTIVES

- Identify mental-health priorities and lived experiences among Latino/a youth through listening sessions.
- Engage youth as co-designers and leaders in shaping wellness programming.
- Develop community-centered mental-health initiatives informed by cultural values, and youth perspectives.

METHODS

- Sessions were held at St. Adalbert Church. Listening sessions included open-ended questions about stress, belonging, coping, and what support youth wished existed for mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- A co-design session invited youth to brainstorm and select program ideas, choose preferred formats, and outline leadership roles. Youth provided feedback on event types, communication strategies, and activities that felt safe and meaningful.
- Qualitative responses were recorded through notes and thematic discussion. Themes were examined collaboratively by facilitators using inductive content analysis. Themes were validated by cross-checking across sessions and participant feedback.

RESULTS

Participation

- 11 middle & high school Latino/a youth
- 2 listening sessions + 1 co-design session
- Youth formed a Youth Advisory Board to meet quarterly

Key Themes

Theme 1: Safe and Supportive Spaces

Youth described wanting safe, non-judgmental spaces to open up about stress, identity, and emotions. Many shared that emotional conversations at home can feel minimized, and that adults sometimes struggle to understand their experiences.

Theme 2: Belonging and Self-Worth

Youth expressed pride in their community's kindness and shared values, while also naming challenges such as comparison, bullying, and social-media pressure.

Theme 3: Creative and Active Coping

Art and sports were identified as meaningful ways to connect, decompress, and build friendships. Youth shared that these activities feel accessible and enjoyable ways to support emotional wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

- Youth emphasized needing trusted, culturally familiar spaces to talk about stress and identity.
- Responses highlighted generational and cultural gaps in how mental health is discussed, underscoring a need for supportive adult allies and non-judgmental listening.
- Co-design fostered youth leadership, confidence, and a sense of ownership in shaping community wellness initiatives.

CONCLUSION

- Build ongoing youth leadership roles in planning, outreach, and event facilitation.
- Offer wellness programming that integrates cultural and faith-affirming practices when desired by youth.
- Continue gathering youth feedback to refine programming and assess impact.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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