The Sweet Potato Project II

Cultivating Youth Leadership, Wellness & Economic Empowerment

CRDP California Reducing Disparities Project | CDPH California Department of Public Health

SWEET POTATO PROJECT 2 — TODAY'S HARVEST CHANGING TOMORROW'S FUTURE

West Fresno family resource center — Empowering the Community

A member of HUD designated EnVision CENTERS

A Community Defined Evidence Practice (CDEP) in West Fresno

Program Purpose

The Sweet Potato Project serves African American youth (ages 12–15) in West Fresno through:

- Agricultural entrepreneurship
- Mental health education
- Leadership development
- Cultural empowerment

Goal: Prevent school dropout, substance use, and disengagement by building resilience and economic skills.

Community Context

- Median income: **$34,147**
- High poverty & food apartheid
- Legacy of redlining

Program Model & Methods

36-week curriculum integrating:

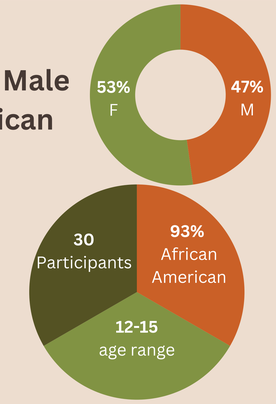
Mental health awareness
Coping & resilience skills
Farming instruction
Business planning
Public speaking

Cultural Significance of Farming

- Black farming legacy
- Land-based learning
- Economic self-determination
- Cultural pride

Participants

- **Total 30** youth
- **53% Female / 93% African American**
- **93% African American**
- **12-15** age range



Mixed Methods Evaluation

- GPA tracking & attendance records
- Community driven focus
- Parent interviews
- Staff observations
- Document review

Evaluation Period
January 2023- December 2025

Mental Health & Wellness

Safe spaces, peer support & emotional growth

Outcomes

Parents reported:
"My son was shy, now he talks to anyone."

- Improvements in:
- Confidence
- Leadership
- Communication
- Peer support

Program Challenges & Limitations

Challenges:

- No clinical mental health staff
- Limited formal assessments
- Summer activity gap
- Funding uncertainty

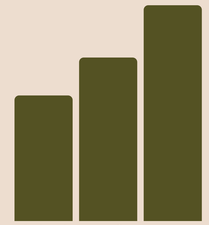
Sustainability, Scale & Systems

Sustainability

- District Partnerships
- Braided funding
- Staff retention

Scalability

- Replicable curriculum
- Cost modeling



Systems Transformation

- Coalition building
- Policy engagement
- Data sovereignty

Next Steps

1. Strengthen data systems
2. Integrate licensed clinicians
3. Launch alumni tracking
4. Expand year-round programs
5. Secure district partnerships

This work was made possible in part by funds received from the **California Department of Public Health**, **Office of Health Equity's California Reducing Disparities Project**, Contract #19-10516-A2.