



Photo: Hugo Sanchez

Youth Development Awardees

 King County

Best Starts for
KIDS

4C (Clergy, Community for Children Youth Coalition)

“For 25 years, the 4C Coalition has served youth of color in highly effective, evidence-based mentoring programs, in partnership with King County schools, boosting academic achievement, enhancing self-confidence, and providing positive role models. With this new King County grant, we’ll expand our Ubuntu group mentoring program --currently serving 25 youth each year -- to serve more than 200 middle and high school students annually. In the Zulu language, Ubuntu means “I am because we all are.” It’s a beautiful concept that reflects the 4C’s shared commitment to building community, deepening cultural connections, and creating a positive force for change to elevate the next generation.”



Photo: Ron Johnson

Adaptive And Inclusive Movement Initiative (AIM)

“We’re thrilled to partner with Best Starts for Kids to expand inclusive arts and movement opportunities for Disabled and Neurodivergent youth across King County. With this support, AIM will continue building spaces where Disabled and non-Disabled youth come together to create, learn and lead in community. We’re especially excited to deepen our commitment to equity by offering more accessible programming that centers youth voice, including extended hours for our arts-based day program, our new Youth Council, and our expanded internship program.”



Photo: Tammy Marx Photography

Afghan Health Initiative

“At the Afghan Health Initiative, we’re creating space for immigrant and refugee youth to feel seen, supported, and celebrated. Through our Youth Resiliency Program, young people shape our work with their voices and lived experiences. They lead workshops, build leadership skills, and connect with mentors who truly understand their journey. With support from Best Starts for Kids, we’re excited to grow this work and reach even more youth across our community.”

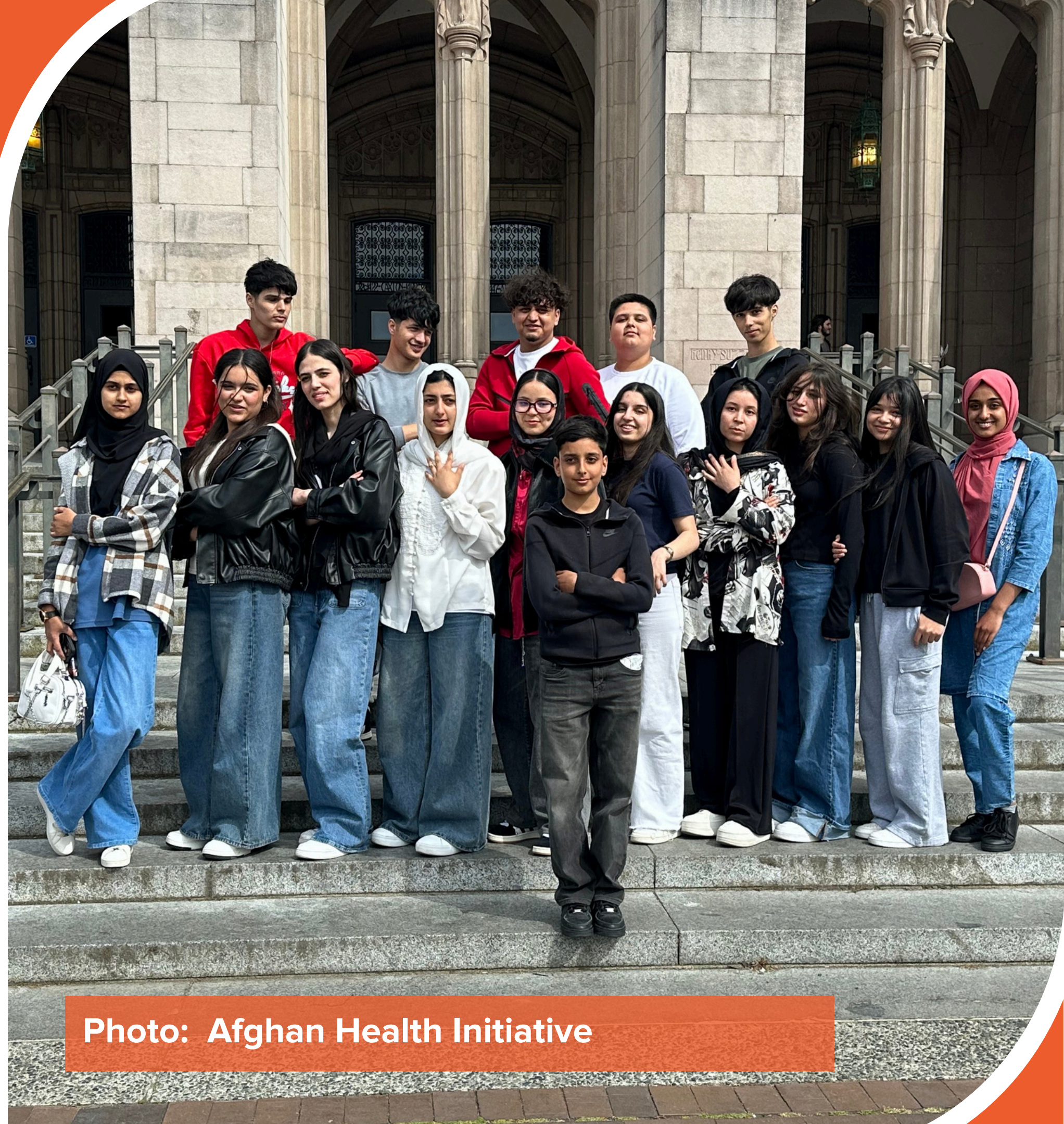


Photo: Afghan Health Initiative

Asian Counseling and Referral Service

“We have witnessed the Asian girls in our pilot program, bond, build confidence, and gain important skills to reduce mental health symptoms, build skills to avoid risky behaviors, gain confidence and a sense of belonging. We have seen American-born bond with newly arrived immigrants, where they may have not otherwise, if they did not connect in the group. With King County, Best Starts for Kid's support, we are excited to continue to see our youth develop powerful relationships and leadership skills for their own futures and for many generations to come. We are excited about our partnership with Best Starts to be in community with other organizations, to dream, support one another and thrive together, for the empowerment of our youth.”



Photo: Asian Counseling and Referral Service

Bridges - Seattle APG

“At Bridges, we are dedicated to creating a safe, supportive, and empowering recovery community for young people and their families. Through peer mentorship, connection, and leadership development, we’re helping youth in recovery build meaningful, substance-free lives. We’re especially excited about the partnership with Best Starts for Kids, which will allow us to deepen our impact and expand access to our services for youth who need it most.”



Photo: Bridges - Seattle APG

Canopy Scholars

“Canopy Scholars will be working toward education equity for underserved middle-school students in the Shoreline School District. This grant award will give marginalized students, already overcoming tremendous odds, access to an after-school tutoring and mentoring program.

We are most excited about the lives that will be impacted by our partnership with Best Starts for Kids!”



Photo: Canopy Scholars

Cocreative Culture

“At Cocreative Culture, we are walking with youth as they heal, lead, and build brighter futures. Through our UJANA program, we will support and uplift youth most impacted by systemic injustice, including immigrants, refugees, and justice-involved youth with restorative circles, creative expression, and mentorship rooted in our holistic and culturally grounded approach Ubuntu “I am because we are.” This partnership with Best Starts gives us the opportunity to deepen our reach and uplift the next generation of leaders with the care and resources they deserve.”



Photo: Cocreative Culture

Community for Youth (CfY)

“At Community for Youth, we are so very excited to continue our partnership with King County and Best Starts for Kids. Our program works with young adults (ages 14-19) in the South Seattle and South King County area, creating one-to-one mentoring pairs and a safe and inclusive community that fosters college and career readiness as well as social-emotional well-being. We are looking forward to the next 3 years of growth into the Highline and Tukwila School Districts, creating more opportunities for young people to connect and thrive as they transition into adulthood and their next phase of career or college after High School. One of the wonderful ways that Best Starts for Kids supports our program and our organization is through the amazing capacity building resources, creating a more holistic partnership that helps our organization and our staff build a more sustainable foundation, enabling our program to grow and reach more students. “



Photo: Community for Youth (CfY)

Coyote Central

“At Coyote Central, we are committed to nurturing creativity in young people by providing them with the tools and opportunities necessary to develop skills and shape their futures. With the support of the Best Starts for Kids grant, we aim to enhance our impact throughout the Greater Seattle Area by expanding our programs to serve historically underserved youth. Our focus will be on increasing access to inclusive, hands-on arts and vocational programs that also promote socio-emotional development. We look forward to collaborating with other organizations to broaden learning opportunities for the youth in King County.”



Photo: Coyote Central

Eastside Pathways

“Eastside Pathways will be working toward expanding culturally affirming mentorship and leadership opportunities for Black youth in East King County through our Pizza with a Purpose program. In service of young people, Eastside Pathways along with its partners Africans on the Eastside and Eastside Youth Coalition are focused on building meaningful, identity-reflective relationships that foster belonging, confidence, and access to post-secondary opportunities. Eastside Pathways is excited about this partnership with King County Best Starts for Kids, which will help us advance educational equity and empower the next generation of community leaders. “



Photo: Eastside Pathways

Flourish Financial Group

"The Flourish Financial Empowerment Program helps BIPOC youth build financial independence through culturally responsive coaching on money management, credit, investing, and generational wealth. We're excited to partner with Best Starts for Kids to expand our impact and support youth success."

Friends Of The Children - Seattle

"Friends of the Children—Seattle provides long-term professional mentorship to youth facing the greatest life obstacles in our community. Youth are matched with a paid professional mentor from kindergarten through high school graduation. With support from Best Starts for Kids, we're deepening our program development for youth ages 5-11 to build a solid foundation through intentional mentoring that they can carry into their teens and adulthood. Through consistent paid mentors, deepened family engagement, and an offering of more opportunities for growth and connection, we work long-term to ensure long-term success for each child."



Photo: Friends Of The Children - Seattle

Game Of Life Sports Mentoring (GOL)

“In every community of color there is a hoop culture that exists and transcends poverty, homelessness, racism, and many forms of mental health problems. The Game of Life Mentoring has capitalized on the deep rooted attraction to hoop that is shared by many in minority communities, using it to gear their lives toward the trades, starting businesses and finding success in education.

Basketball has been the true secret sauce and the best possible way to engage the otherwise disengaged. GOL meets twice a week at a local gym where youth between the ages of 15-25, play 4 on 4 pickup basketball with positive reliable hoop court monitors from their community. “ (From GOL website)

Girls Inc. Of The Pacific Northwest

“At Girls Inc. of the Pacific Northwest, we believe every young person deserves a safe space to be seen, heard, and celebrated. With support from Best Starts for Kids, we’re deepening our partnership with Highline Public Schools to provide after-school and in-school Girls Groups which nurtures confidence, leadership, and positive identity development in youths. We’re especially excited to reach more Black, Indigenous, and youth of color—creating spaces where they thrive, build strong peer connections, and grow into their most bold and authentic selves.” – Nadja Sailesman, CEO, Girls Inc. of the Pacific Northwest



Photo: Girls Inc. Of The Pacific Northwest

KBTC/Bates Technical College

“KBTC will be collaborating with neurodivergent youth and teens with disabilities in Federal Way Public Schools Employment Transition and Deaf and Hard of Hearing programs to co-create powerful, youth-led videos that build life skills, strengthen positive identity, and share authentic stories that reflect and uplift their lived experiences.”



Photo: KBTC/Bates Technical College

KLA Enterprises, LLC Dba Lajuana Johnson Leadership Development

“From the Root to the Fruit™ is an early learning youth development initiative led by LaJuana Johnson Leadership Development and Kidus Montessori. Designed to uplift children from historically excluded communities, the program centers cultural identity, emotional wellness, and intergenerational connection.

Through culturally affirming Montessori education, land-based rituals, and family-led wellness circles, children develop confidence, leadership, and emotional literacy. This is not enrichment—it’s legacy work. We nurture leadership from the beginning, honoring each child’s brilliance while building protective factors that support lifelong success.

We don’t wait for harm to intervene—we plant protection early.

We’re most excited about building something our community has always known we needed: a healing-centered, culturally grounded space where children and families are not only supported—but centered.

This partnership reflects the best of who we are:

LaJuana Johnson Leadership Development, with a legacy of equity-rooted leadership and systems transformation, and Kidus Montessori, a trusted, Black-led learning sanctuary that has served Seattle families for nearly 40 years.

Together, we’re not just launching a program—we’re modeling what it looks like to lead with culture, honor legacy, and build from community brilliance.”

Korean Community Service Center – KCSC

"The Korean Community Service Center is excited that YouthKAN will continue to be a youth-driven space to freely and safely be Asian American, and to work on addressing priorities such as mental health, intergenerational wellness, and dispelling the myth of the model minority.

We are most excited about investing resources and energy in our three annual interns as an opportunity for career and leadership development and as a strategy for long-term sustainability."



Photo: KCSC

Look2justice

At Look2Justice, we are empowering young people—especially those impacted by the criminal legal system—with the tools to understand how laws are made and how they can use their voices to create change. We believe that early civic education and empowerment is a powerful tool to disrupt the school to prison pipeline as it helps foster belonging and engagement. Through hands-on civic education workshops in schools, community centers, and juvenile detention centers, our Civic Education for Youth program equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective advocates for themselves and their communities. We're most excited to partner with Best Start for Kids to expand this transformative work and support the next generation of community leaders who are already imagining a more just future.

Mary's Place Seattle

“We are deeply grateful for this investment in families and children experiencing homelessness. This partnership provides an exciting opportunity to expand our capacity to serve our youngest guests—children and youth make up more than half of the individuals we shelter. When youth tell us that our staff members are what make our program so impactful, it reinforces how transformative these relationships can be. This funding will help us continue fostering the connected community environment where our youth can not only survive their current circumstances but truly thrive both in shelter and beyond.”- Dominique Alex, CEO.



Photo: Mary's Place Seattle

Melanin Poppin' LLC

“We are most excited to expand our reach, deepen our impact, and provide more opportunities to empower and strengthen our scholars and their families. With this support, we can continue to prioritize and strengthen support in their mental wellness, physical wellness, academic achievement, social and emotional growth, cultural pride, — all within our safe, culturally affirming, and healing-centered space.

This partnership with Best Starts for Kids means everything to our program. It reflects what's possible when the community comes together to invest in the brilliance and future of Black and Brown youth and families.”



Photo: Melanin Poppin' LLC

Outdoor Equity Coalition

“Through our Hikes for Healing initiative, we create safe, healing-centered spaces in nature for BIPOC youth and families across Washington State—from Millersylvania to Dash Point to Wallace Falls.

Youth are not only participating—they are leading. From paid internships and birdwatching at state parks to organizing peer-led Teen-to-Teen Town Hall Forums/Gatherings for Teens to exchange youth engagement strategies, as they move to reclaiming space in the outdoors and shaping a more inclusive, just future in the communities they serve.”

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Photo: Outdoor Equity Coalition

POST 84

“POST 84 will run a youth-led outdoor program for high school students including 13+ multi-day overnight trips and 3+ day trips per year. POST trips build community and create engaging experiences for Seattle-area teens to play, hike, camp, bike, kayak, rock climb, and learn about nature in a student-facilitated environment.

We look forward to increasing access for high school students to connect with each other in nature. We are excited to see them meet new friends, learn about the natural world, and develop their leadership skills. “



Photo: POST 84

Rainier Athletes

"This funding will expand and deepen the impact of our long-term 1-on-1 youth mentoring program. With RA support, students in 4th grade through high school are paired with trusted, relatable mentors. Together, they explore identity and build leadership skills to navigate school and community systems authentically and confidently.

"(We are excited to be) showing more young people that we believe in them! The Best Starts For Kids partnership unlocks a network of support that will help us connect all the students on our waitlist with dedicated mentors who support them in discovering their unique and unlimited possibilities."

Roots of Inclusion

“At Roots of Inclusion, we are building a youth-led movement where disabled and BIPOC middle school students are not just participants but co-designers, advocates, and change agents. Through our new Youth Organizing Fellowship, young people will lead a community listening tour, develop a Know-Your-Rights curriculum, and build cross-generational mentorship networks to advance disability justice across King County. We are most excited to co-create with youth from the ground up, honoring their lived experiences, leadership, and brilliance as central to shaping inclusive, equitable systems.”

SanArte

“At SanArte, we are walking with Indigenous, Black, and migrant youth through a 28-month journey of healing, leadership, and cultural reconnection. With art, land, language, and ceremony as our tools, we are co-creating spaces where young people can feel proud of who they are, surrounded by community, and supported to lead. We’re especially excited to bring multilingual, culturally grounded programming to youth and families who have too often been excluded from traditional systems, and to show that when the snow is softer where we walk, it’s because others have walked this path before us and shown us the way.”



Photo: Hugo Sanchez

Seattle Children's Hospital - Odessa Brown Children's Clinic (OBCC)

“Odessa Brown Children's Clinic is dedicated to empowering youth by engaging them in leadership roles, providing robust career exploration, and addressing social inequities. Through our Career Pathways Leadership Program, we aim to cultivate and nurture the next generation of health advocates and professionals, ensuring that young people's unique insights, ideas and brilliance drive meaningful community health initiatives. We are especially excited to see youth take on leadership roles and contribute to meaningful community health projects through the Junior Governance Council who will oversee a youth-led mini grant program, allowing young people to develop and implement their own community health projects.”



Photo: OBCC

TEAM READ

“The heart of Team Read is the hundreds of high school teens who tutor elementary school students who were referred by their teachers for reading support. We’re excited to work with Belong Partners to further develop the leadership and mentoring skills of these talented reading coaches. We are grateful to Best Starts for Kids for the opportunity to deepen our impact throughout the region.”



Photo: TEAM READ

Trail Youth

“At Trail Youth, we’re honored to walk alongside teens ages 13–19, offering a safe and welcoming space, free counseling, real-world job training in barista skills and cafe management, and advocacy for those impacted by domestic violence and sexual abuse. We are deeply grateful to King County for awarding us the Best Start for Kids grant, which helps us continue equipping youth to discover their value, voice, and purpose.”

Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle

“At Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle we are helping our students plan for life after high school through exposure and opportunity. We are excited for this partnership because it allows us to reach more youth and broaden the unique college and career opportunities we offer youth.”



Photo: Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle

UTOPIA (United Territories Of Pacific Islanders Alliance)

Washington

“At UTOPIA Washington, we are committed to creating spaces where QTPI, 2SLGBTQIA+ and BIPOC youth who are often navigating multiple layers of marginalization, can feel seen, supported, and rooted in community. Our youth programs uplift cultural education, leadership development, and wellness practices that center their lived experiences and joy. Whether through our youth retreats, peer-led support circles, or cultural workshops, we’re cultivating spaces where youth can grow into their voices, connect with their heritage, and build lasting relationships amongst one another and intergenerationally as well. We’re not shaping them into something new, we’re holding space for who they already are and supporting them in discovering their power.”



Photo: UTOPIA

VOCFINU - Voices Of Children's Faith in Northern Uganda

“AT VOCFINU, equity is our foundation. We are proud to be a black-led and immigrant focused non profit. We work to dismantle systemic barriers facing marginalized youth, especially immigrants, refugees and youth of color in South King County. Our proposed program, Voices of the Future will focus on youth leadership initiatives. We believe our Youth hold untapped leadership potential. This program will create culturally responsive youth led spaces where participants are celebrated for their identities and empowered to shape their futures.

We are particularly excited about the partnership with King County to uplift Youth Voices by turning lived experiences into leadership assets, building community brilliance and fostering cultural pride.”

Youth Guidance

“Youth Guidance Greater Seattle is proud to serve students at four Highline Public Schools—Chinook and Sylvester Middle Schools, and Highline and Tyee High Schools—through the Becoming a Man (BAM) program, which provides school-based group mentoring and counseling. With this Best Starts for Kids investment, we’ll be able to deepen our impact and expand to a new high school partner, bringing our evidence-based support to even more young men. We’re excited to continue helping students stay engaged, graduate, and lead with purpose—alongside our dedicated school and district partners who make this work possible.”



Photo: Youth Guidance