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ANDREW BLUM¹

Executive Director, Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice

Youth Empowerment: Authenticity, Growth, and Impact²

On the warm afternoon of May 15, 2022, Arthur Soriano was in his old stomping grounds at Teralta Park, a small urban park atop a sunken freeway in San Diego's City Heights neighborhood. In the 1980s, Arthur had roamed the park and the surrounding streets as a teenage gang member, going on to spend two decades in prison. In Spring 2022, he returned to the park for different reasons.

Arthur was released from incarceration on April 13, 2012 at the age of 36. Upon his release, he found himself below the poverty line, struggling to obtain employment, and more importantly, unable to reconnect with his community after being away for so long. Arthur decided it was time to make a change because he realized he could use his own experiences to guide others down a different path than the one he had taken. Every weekend for three years, and with no funding, Arthur, his wife Gabby, and more than a dozen other volunteers went to the park to shoot hoops, barbecue, and build connections with young people. These youth were growing up in City Heights, a neighborhood where poverty, trauma, and violence have intersected for decades. Arthur and Gabby also began running workshops on youth leadership and restorative justice at a neighborhood church. The organization Arthur led in 2022, Youth Empowerment, grew organically out of this work.

From its beginnings in Teralta Park, Youth Empowerment had become an organization with nine staff members, an annual budget of roughly \$1 million, and program streams focused on justice-involved youth, reentry programs for formerly incarcerated adults, programs designed for parents of at-risk youth, and prevention programs in public schools in San Diego. As Youth Empowerment grew, Arthur still returned to Teralta Park regularly to talk with, and listen to, the young people in his community. Walking home on that May afternoon, he thought about the conversations he had with the youth in the park that day and all the needs his community had. There was much for him to think about. He mused:

The needs in our community are so great, but our funders won't help our organization grow. Ninety percent of our funds are for programs and funds often only come for one year at a

¹ The Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice is an applied research institute whose core mission is to develop and champion evidence-based, justice-centered solutions, to ending cycles of violence. Support was provided by Visiting Scholar and Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia, Honorary Professor María Helena Jaén. University of San Diego cases are developed solely as the basis for case discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

² This version of the case is a final pre-designed version. Users are welcomed to use this version until a final designed version is completed.

time or less. I have almost nothing to invest in the organization to build its capacity. I know I need to spend more time fundraising and building relationships with funders, but I know I can't lose touch with my community – that's what's made us successful to begin with.

So many of the problems our community faces are caused by the injustices of the justice system. To have a greater impact, I know we need to change the system. But so many people in our community need help right now. Should I spend more time mentoring those who come through our door? Or more time meeting with government officials downtown?

Youth Empowerment came from Teralta Park. Those are my people. My experience is their experience. I want to help all of them and everyone else who walks through our door. But if we try to help everyone, our staff may be overwhelmed. The quality of our services may suffer. Maybe we won't deliver on our promises to funders. Do we need to say no to some people now, to say yes to more people in the future?

The City Heights Neighborhood

Youth Empowerment was founded in, and has primarily served, the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego (see Exhibit 5). In 2018, by some measures, City Heights was the [most diverse neighborhood](#) in the country. The population spoke more than 30 languages and included Latino, Pacific Islander, African American, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Somali people, among others. In 2020, its 6.5 square miles housed roughly [100,000 residents](#).

In 2022, City Heights was also one of the poorest neighborhoods in San Diego, with a poverty rate over double that of San Diego as a whole. Over 40% of the population lived at the federal poverty rate or below and over 90% of City Heights students were eligible for free or reduced lunches.³ See Exhibit 6 for more points of comparison between City Heights and San Diego.

Overall, violent crime had decreased in City Heights, and San Diego more generally, since crime peaked in the early 1990s. However, [homicides in San Diego increased by 20%](#) from mid-2020 to mid-2021 and violent crime remained a persistent challenge in certain [pockets of City Heights](#).

Disproportionate numbers of young people from City Heights have been involved with the justice system. For example, the 92105 zip code in City Heights was one of the [three zip codes in San Diego County](#) with the highest number of youth on probation, which was roughly six times as many youth per capita as in wealthier parts of the city. Many of these youth ended up incarcerated, and when they returned from incarceration, they returned to neighborhoods that lacked opportunities for meaningful employment and few resources to support the unique needs of justice-involved individuals. In these neighborhoods, the significant influence of gang culture added an element of heightened risk for reentry, and many returning young people found themselves drawn back into a continuing cycle of poverty, crime, and incarceration.

The aforementioned statistics were what the data said about City Heights, but Arthur's perspective of City Heights was from the grass roots. As he went about his work building Youth Empowerment,

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<https://oceandiscoveryinstitute.org/city-heights/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20poorest%20areas,not%20graduated%20from%20high%20school>. Accessed August 1 2022.

he engaged in what his colleagues sometimes called “the politics of the streets.” He knew much of what was happening on every street corner and understood the landscape of the gangs and how it was evolving. He knew how to avoid angering the wrong people and how to form partnerships with people who wanted to help him. He knew who was going into prison, who was coming out, and what was going on inside the prison walls that might impact his own neighborhood. Based on this knowledge, he thought he knew who might be looking for help, whether they were inside prison or out, and who might be ready to make a change that Youth Empowerment could support.

Origins of Youth Empowerment

As Arthur worked in Teralta Park in the first years after his release, others began to take notice. Organizations like [Community Connections for Youth](#) and the [Latino Coalition](#) connected with him to learn more about his work with the youth in the community and provide support in small and informal ways. Arthur became convinced that what he was doing could genuinely help the community, but also knew he would need more resources to have any kind of real impact. He began to think about raising funds and starting an organization. He said, “To help, you need resources, and how do you get resources? You got to have an organization.” His first real step in this direction came in 2017 when the head of the [Latino Coalition](#), Richard Ramos, provided funding for Arthur to launch Project Empowerment, a mentoring program for youth aged 18–24 in City Heights. Arthur ran the grant through [Mi Casa Es Su Casa](#), another San Diego-based community organization that was run by his mother. Soon after that, the [CARE Community Center](#) gave Arthur a one-year contract to continue the mentoring work.

These initiatives proved to other funders that Arthur was not limited to working informally; in fact, he could also implement programs. As a result, in 2019, Youth Empowerment received a \$500,000 grant from the Bureau of State and Community Corrections to mentor adults leaving prison. Just one month later, [SAY San Diego](#), one of the largest social service providers in San Diego, asked him to partner on their Community Resilience Mentoring Program for youth. Youth Empowerment received an annual grant of up to \$125,000 each year for three years for this work.

Niki Martinez

Niki Martinez and Arthur grew up in the same neighborhood, and even went to Wilson Middle School together, although they were not friends at the time. They were sent to prison the same year within months of each other (i.e., Niki in May 1994 and Arthur in August 1994). At that time, Niki was 17 years old when she was sentenced to 45 years in prison and ended up serving 25 consecutive years inside of juvenile hall, county jail, the California Youth Authority, and the Central California Women’s Facility in Chowchilla, California.

While she was in prison, Niki witnessed violence, saw her friends being attacked, and saw individuals traumatized. She stated, “The pain I felt when I saw my friends suffering violence, I realized that was the pain I had caused in the friends and family of my victims.” This experience was the spark that caused Niki to want to change. Over the next few years, she slowly began to change her behavior, heal, find ways to make amends, and try to make positive contributions in prison and beyond.

Niki had entered prison as a juvenile and realized that juvenile offenders, who never experienced life outside of a prison as an adult, had special needs. One of her first steps toward trying to make a

positive contribution was forming the Juvenile Offenders Committee with three other women. The organization was founded to advocate on behalf of juveniles who had been tried as adults, such as working for more lenient parole processes for people convicted as juveniles. By July 2022, the committee had 130 active members working to support juvenile offenders and advocate on their behalf. Niki also became a certified drug and alcohol counselor and obtained her AA degree.

Niki was released from prison on March 14, 2019. Arthur knew about the work Niki had done in prison and invited her to participate in Youth Empowerment's programming. After the program, he offered her a job with Youth Empowerment as a mentor. In less than 12 months, she became the chief operating officer of Youth Empowerment. In that role, she guided the work of the organization while also guiding and supporting people coming out of prison or impacted by the justice system in other ways.

The Lived Experience Model and Youth Empowerment's Work

Combined, Arthur and Niki served over 40 years in prison. As they began their work outside of prison in their community, they became part of an emerging movement that saw this lived experience as an asset as opposed to a liability. Organizations such as [The Credible Messenger Justice Center](#) argued these types of mentors were effective, stating, "From the same background and speaking the same language, Credible Messengers are able to break through to [the mentees] and form powerful, transformative, personal relationships."

The lived experience movement gave Arthur and Niki a framework to describe the contribution they could make in their community and a national network of support as they sought to grow their organization. By 2022, they were implementing multiple programs and working on both direct service delivery and on broader systems change initiatives..

Service Delivery

The Community Mentor Adult Reentry Program worked with 50 individuals a year. Each participant received 90 minutes of mentoring per week for eight weeks from a lived experience mentor. Participants also received other services and training, including career readiness and job placement, substance abuse prevention, support to manage posttraumatic stress disorder (i.e., PTSD), and parenting classes. This program was funded by the California Board of State and Community Corrections.

The Resilience Program worked with 20 youth per year. Each youth received 4–6 hours of group and individual mentoring from lived experience mentors per week for six months, along with activities, including cognitive behavioral therapy, parent classes for participants and/or their parents, and more recreational activities such as bowling, hiking, or trips to the beach. This work was funded by the probation department and overseen by SAY San Diego, one of the largest social service providers in San Diego.

As a result of the work with both youth and adults, Arthur and Niki realized focusing on parenting could play an important role in increasing their impact. Many of their adult mentees were trying to reestablish relationships with their children. Many of their youth mentees had broken relationships with their parents and were parents themselves. To help break the intergenerational cycle of

incarceration, Arthur and Niki began using the Parents on a Mission Program curriculum as part of their programming. The program was designed to help parents heal broken relationships with their children and reestablish respect for parental authority and discipline.

The Parents on a Mission Program was an eight-week curriculum delivered to small groups of parents, normally as an add on to Youth Empowerment's other programs. For instance, Youth Empowerment had established Parents on a Mission groups as part of their Resilience Program, their Community Mentor Program, and their work in San Diego Unified School District Schools.

Many children of these parents were at risk, but were not yet involved in the justice system. The work with parents created opportunities for Youth Empowerment to work on more prevention-focused programs. In 2021, they established the school-based IMAGINE Program.

The IMAGINE Program worked with at-risk students in seven public schools in City Heights. The 12-week program for both middle-school students and high-school students combined restorative circles with a cognitive behavioral therapy curriculum, mentoring by lived experience mentors, and Parents on a Mission training for both parents of the students and students who were parents.

Systems Change

All of the aforementioned programs provided a service to people participating in the programs, including mentoring, training, or support services for things like addressing substance abuse or finding affordable housing. These programs focused on individual participants, but Arthur, Niki, and Youth Empowerment also wanted to create broader, systemic change.

Part of Youth Empowerment's commitment to a lived experience approach was working toward the goal of creating opportunities for people with a lived experience of involvement *with* the justice system to work *in* the justice system. Despite the growth of the lived experience model, formerly incarcerated individuals have still often been expressly prohibited from becoming parole officers. Often, Youth Empowerment was told by the probation department that certain individuals could not serve as mentors in their programs. They were given no rationale for these decisions, nor was there any way to appeal the decision or revisit the decision in the future.

From Youth Empowerment's lived experience perspective, it was precisely formerly incarcerated individuals who should be parole officers or mentors because they knew better than anyone what individuals leaving prison need. The advocacy and system change work of Youth Empowerment was focused on changing the justice system by making the system more open to hiring, engaging with, and leveraging the expertise of people with lived experience of arrest, probation, and incarceration.

Some of Youth Empowerment's advocacy efforts relied primarily on Arthur's energy. He provided expertise to law enforcement as a gang consultant and was an expert witness for superior and federal court systems. He also presented regularly from his lived experience perspective to San Diego County Office of Probation, San Diego Police Department, San Diego Attorney General Office, San Diego City Council, and San Diego County Board of Supervisors. Arthur worked hard to build and maintain relationships with these policymakers. Youth Empowerment respected the activist organizations that took a more confrontational approach to create change, but Arthur often said, "I'm an advocate, not an activist." Youth Empowerment could occupy a middle ground between activists

and the police or probation system. Arthur also stated, “Youth Empowerment doesn’t get criticized in the same way as other organizations for working with these agencies because of our lived experience.”

Youth Empowerment received two grants totaling \$350,000 in Fall 2021 to launch the Trauma-Informed Care Code of Conduct (TICCC) initiative. The initiative developed a cohort of 10 justice system-impacted youth to serve as trainers and advocates of the TICCC, with the goal of having organizations that provided substance abuse services adopt the TICCC. In addition to the direct impact of the training, the program was designed to normalize the idea that justice-involved youth, with lived experience of the justice system, could and should be involved in shaping the justice system and social service delivery moving forward.

Lived Experience and the Open Door Ethos

Although the programs Youth Empowerment were implementing helped pay Arthur’s staff, rent, and other bills, he never considered the programs as the beating heart of the organization. For him, the beating heart was its open door ethos. Arthur and the staff maintained a commitment of helping literally anyone who walked in their door. This ethos was integral to their identity as a lived experience organization. Because they had lived the experience in their own lives, they knew the importance of providing what are often called “big little things.” The help could mean finding someone a place to sleep for a night, getting them a bus pass to make it to a probation appointment, or helping them fill out a form to get benefits. They also knew how to help individuals navigate the challenges facing them. These challenges were often not simply logistical; rather, they were often emotional or behavioral, perhaps caused by withdrawal or posttraumatic stress. Most importantly, despite the fact that no funders were paying Youth Empowerment to provide these services, they were committed to never turning anyone away. They knew the individuals coming through their door often had nowhere else to go.

This open door ethos was illustrated by the following stories of a few of the individuals who Youth Empowerment supported.

Took Me a Long Time, Took Me A Lot of Times

“T” was affiliated with the Mexican mafia and served time in prison with Arthur. He was fully immersed in the criminal life (e.g., drugs, sex, money, guns). He would be out of prison for six months, then back in prison. Based on his relationship with Arthur, T had started working with Youth Empowerment, but was still in bad relationships, and was still doing drugs. He ended up being on the run and was eventually caught by federal law enforcement. T was facing 25 years in prison.

Arthur was still in touch with T, asking him: “Are you ready or not to change his life?” According to Arthur, “Everyone goes through all these stages; you never know when it will happen, but there will always be a turning point for everyone.” He added:

We need to be present, no matter what. Waiting for that moment. When are you going to make that decision? Took me a long time. Took me a lot of times. Everybody’s got their time. Why the door’s always open.

An “Aha Moment”

“J” was running the streets with Arthur when they were both teenagers and in gangs. J’s background was one of violence and trauma. He was half Filipino and half Mexican, which, according to Arthur, meant he was always needing to prove himself and to prove that he belonged. J constantly battled drug addiction and was in and out of prison many times since 1996. During his last time in prison, he began the process of getting clean and heard in prison about the work Arthur was doing with Youth Empowerment.

Arthur ran into J, who was 46, at the Community Transition Center. Even during the worst of times, Arthur said he knew J had a good heart. He would look out for women, such as making sure they stayed safe even in dangerous situations. J started with Youth Empowerment two months after his release from prison in February 2021. He consistently showed up for his Youth Empowerment meetings and was working full time. Arthur said J wanted to stay clean for his kids and his grandkids, saying, “J was one of the true dope friends from the past, but I believe he’s had his aha moment.”

From a Mexican Prison to Mentoring Youth to the Marine Corps

“H’s” involvement with gangs began when he was 12 years old. Before he was 18 years old, he was serving time as a juvenile and later served almost three years in a Mexican prison. H was released from prison in Mexico in 2021 and returned to the United States to regain custody of his daughter. He had been in touch on and off with Arthur over the years and reconnected with Youth Empowerment when he returned to the United States. In three short months, he completed the Parents on a Mission Program and began training to be a youth mentor and a youth trainer for Youth Empowerment’s TICCC program. H shared:

I was ready to make changes, become a positive role model to my daughter, my younger brothers, and my nephews and nieces. I met Arthur and he became my mentor. I saw how he changed his life. He treats me with respect and I respect him.

In 2021, H enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps.

The Funding Challenge

As Youth Empowerment’s program portfolio expanded, their funding challenge became more acute. Arthur said, “If someone wanted to give us more money to do programming, we couldn’t take it. We can’t implement more programs; we’re not looking for more program money.” The problem was not raising funds; the problem was the types of funds Youth Empowerment was able to raise. Only about 10% of the money Youth Empowerment received was unrestricted, and 90% was for programs. According to Niki, this money went directly to pay mentors, rent rooms, pay for transportation, buy food and water, or cover other programmatic costs. She noted, “Once rent and other fixed costs were paid, there were almost no resources were left to invest in strengthening the organization.”

During her time at Youth Empowerment, Niki became convinced that Youth Empowerment needed to professionalize itself as an organization. As someone committed to improving systems and processes, Niki worked to strengthen the case management system, the budgeting and finance processes, the human resources systems, and the capacity of the organization to successfully manage

staff. This work was largely done outside of normal working hours. During normal working hours, Niki worked on Youth Empowerment's programs as a mentor, trainer, and facilitator because programs were what funders were willing to support. After that work was complete, Niki would stay and work to strengthen the organization as a whole. She noted, "Neither Arthur or I get paid to run this organization, only to do work on programs." This challenge often left Niki frustrated. She shared:

I know how much is needed to strengthen Youth Empowerment. We need to invest in fundraising, finance, [information technology], human resources, monitoring and evaluation, and so on, but funders won't pay for these things, and I'm constantly struggling to find time to spend on these kinds of things.

In addition, the funding Youth Empowerment received was often short term (e.g., for six months or one year). This limitation made it hard for Youth Empowerment to hire mentors or other staff because they could not plan long term. Niki said, "We're trying to hire and train mentors, but I can't tell them what happens eight months from now." Steve Vigil, a Youth Empowerment board member, stated, "It's disrespectful. These are long-term problems; [funders] expect miracles, but then give us money for six months or 12 months."

Steve had also worked to expand the advocacy and systems change initiatives at the organization. The work on TICCC was one outcome of those efforts. However, getting funded for this work had proved challenging. Steve noted service delivery programs are less political, provide more immediate results and "feel good" stories, and produce results that are more countable compared to systems change initiatives. He lamented, "Getting funding for this stuff is so hard."

Where to Go From Here

Youth Empowerment had grown beyond what Arthur ever expected as he was laying the foundation for the organization in Teralta Park; however, with growth came real challenges. Arthur felt these challenges deeply. As he sat by himself in his conference room on Friday, July 1, 2022 after a board meeting, he could not help thinking again about several questions plaguing him lately. These questions were crystallized in a comment a board member had made. They stated, "Our number one priority is how we can better serve the community. But long term, how are we going to exist?" Arthur pondered:

How do we get funders to fund us in a way that allows us to grow to meet the needs of our community? Can we get funders to fund us in a way that allows us to grow to meet the needs of our community? How do we convince funders to invest in us as an organization as opposed to just supporting our programmatic activities?

How do we work to meet the needs of those who walk through our door, but also work to change the systems of injustice that create those needs?

Our strong connection to our community is the foundation for our success. How do we grow without losing touch with who we are and where we came from?

These questions kept Arthur up at night.

Exhibit 1: The Team at Youth Empowerment

Arthur Soriano, Founder/Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

As founder and CEO, Arthur oversees all the programs at Youth Empowerment. He is the face of the organization and is a sought-after motivational speaker and subject matter expert. Arthur serves on the board of directors for the National Parents Union and has been a trainer and facilitator for the International Institute for Restorative Practices, the Family and Youth Roundtable for San Diego County, the San Diego Community Mentor Collaborative training program at Alliant University, and the Alternatives to Incarceration Training Institute. Arthur is also the co-author of *Hidden Treasures*, a book that describes the journey from gang life, to prison, to personal transformation.

Niki Martinez, Chief Operations Officer (COO)

As COO, Niki oversees the development and management of all Youth Empowerment programs, monitors grant compliance, is responsible for all of the business operations of the organization, and directs mentor-mentee relationships. She also works as a mentor, trainer, facilitator, and counselor, and has received a wide range of certifications in the fields of substance abuse counseling, trauma-informed counseling, motivational interviewing, and cognitive behavioral therapy. Niki is also a teaching artist in the Old Globe Theater's Reflecting Shakespeare program.

Steve Vigil, Board Member

In addition to serving as a board member, Steve has been actively involved in working to develop Youth Empowerment's advocacy and systems change strategies. Steve started his career in an organization similar to Youth Empowerment, working with Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos. Barrios Unidos was a California-based nonprofit organization with the mission of promoting peace and development in communities affected by youth violence, drugs, and poverty. From there, he joined the United Nations (UN) and has worked in several capacities at the UN Secretariat in New York and in postconflict peacekeeping missions, including in East Timor, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Afghanistan. Following his time with the UN, he has worked on peacebuilding projects in South Sudan, Guatemala, El Salvador, and throughout the United States.

Other Youth Empowerment Staff

Rachel Wales, Chief Administrative Officer

Alexis Crespo, Executive Assistant

Robert Almada, Mentor Coordinator

Gabby Soriano, Parent Coordinator

Joseph Robinson, Youth Mentor

Eddie Salas, Youth Mentor

Maria Robinson, Youth Mentor

Tyrell Richard, Sr., Youth Mentor

Exhibit 2: Youth Empowerment Budget

Youth Empowerment Organizational Budget - 2022	
INCOME	
Government Contracts	\$370,192
Foundations	\$561,139
Corporations	\$35,000
Individual Donations	\$5,000
Fundraising Event	\$42,030
Earned Income	\$36,000
TOTAL INCOME	\$1,049,361
EXPENSES	
Salaries	
Executive Assistant (F/T)	\$52,320
Benefits and Taxes	\$13,080
Professional Services	
Accounting/Financial Services	\$8,000
Fund Development	\$24,984
Campaign Manager	\$39,960
TOTAL Professional Services	\$72,944
COMBINED PERSONNEL (Salaries + Professional Services)	\$138,344
Program Expenses	
Program Salaries	\$588,887
Benefits and Taxes	\$147,222
<i>Project AWARE Fee</i>	\$6,619
<i>Parents on a Mission Fee</i>	\$2,000
Stipends (Youth, Adult)	\$29,051
Field Trips	\$0
Community Engagement Events/Food and Drink	\$21,000
Travel/Conferences/Training	\$7,500
Equipment Purchase/Rental	\$13,000
Printing/Duplicating	\$4,000
Program Supplies	\$3,000
TOTAL Program Expenses	\$822,279
Administration	
Utilities	\$2,400
Telephone/Wi-Fi	\$6,000
Office Supplies	\$2,500
Equipment	\$3,500
Insurance	\$12,000
Software Subscriptions	\$4,000
Rent	\$31,200
Website/Internet Expenses	\$200
Marketing/Promotion	\$1,500
Fundraising Event	\$17,582
Travel/Meals	\$3,000
TOTAL Administration	\$83,882
COMBINED OTPS (other than personnel services)	\$906,161
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,044,505
SURPLUS/DEFICIT	\$4,856

Exhibit 3: Grant Awards Received by Youth Empowerment, 2019–2022

Program	Funder Name	Amount	Grant Term
Level Up Spring 2022	The San Diego Foundation	\$170,987	4 months
Level Up Summer 2022	The San Diego Foundation	\$160,353	2 months
Safe Summers	The San Diego Foundation	\$150,000	4 months
The Children’s Initiative/ Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN 2019)	U.S. Department of Justice	\$50,000	2–3 years
The Children’s Initiative/ Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN 2018)	U.S. Department of Justice	\$130,000	3 years
Adult Reentry Grant Program Proposal 2019. Warm Hand-Off Reentry Services	California Board Of State Community Corrections (BSCC)	\$500,000	42 months
Central Resilience	San Diego County Department of Probation	Reimbursement up to \$198,000 per year; up to 4 years	2–4 years
Elevate Youth	California Department of Health Care Services through The Center at Sierra Health Foundation	\$299,598	2 years
Inspirational Mentoring Agents Generating Incredible Nourishment and Empowerment (I.M.A.G.I.N.E.)	San Diego Unified School District	Reimbursement contract up to \$450,000; over 5 years	5 years
DA	SD County District Attorney	\$50,000	1 year

Exhibit 4: Youth Empowerment Board Members

Arthur sits on the board of Youth Empowerment as president. The other board members are:

Reginald Washington, Vice President

As a young man, Reggie Washington found himself involved with gangs and without awareness of alternative ways to deal with his anger. He founded Project A.W.A.R.E. to teach young people the emotional literacy skills he had lacked. Mr. Washington is now a certified trainer in restorative practices and a certified community mentor, with over a decade of experience working with youth in San Diego County. His multiple trainings come from the National Institute of Corrections, San Diego County District Attorney's Office, and the National Conflict Resolution Center, among other federal and state gang experts.

Leticia Bombardier, Secretary

Leticia Bombardier, owner of Transformative Centered Solutions, serves as a trainer and consultant. As a retired San Diego County supervising probation officer, she is dedicated to collaborating with grassroots and justice/system partners through skill building and engagement. She accomplishes this goal by applying her experience with restorative practices through a trauma-informed lens. Her experience and passion for prevention and intervention in the juvenile and adult justice systems offer engaging opportunities to better serve the community.

Marisol Quevedo Rerucha, Treasurer

Marisol Rerucha is the author of *Beyond the Surface of Restorative Practices: Building a Culture of Equity, Connection, and Healing* and serves as the chief of strategy and partnerships for the National Parents Union. As a former teacher, principal, and nonprofit leader, she uses her voice to challenge systems of oppression and, more importantly, amplifies the voices of others.

Steve Vigil

Steve was raised in the state of Colorado and, at an early age, discovered his ability to organize diverse groups of people toward a common goal. He has a background in conflict transformation, community organizing, and UN peacekeeping. In his formative years, he was actively involved in programs to promote positive lifestyles in youth using education, art, culture, theater, and sports. He has dedicated his life to social justice and has been involved in peacebuilding efforts throughout the United States and the world.

Exhibit 5: Map of City Heights

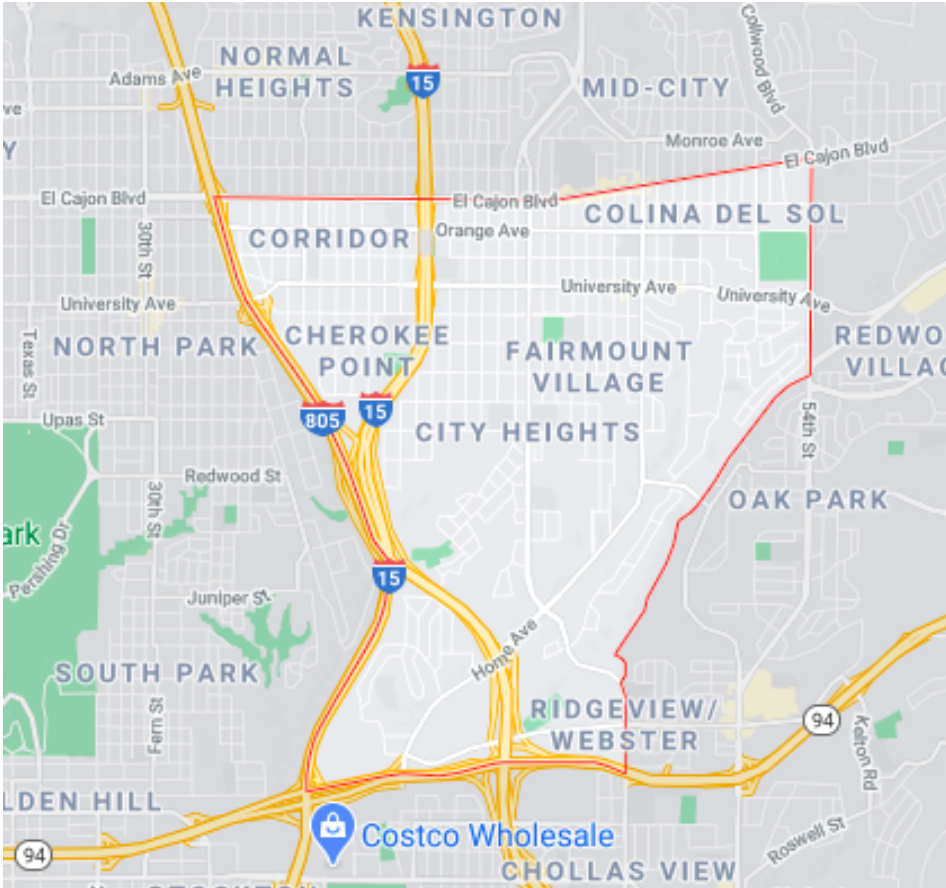


Exhibit 6: City Heights Compared to San Diego⁴

Category	City Heights	San Diego
Population	102,000	1.4 million
Density (people/mile ²)	17,586	4,337
Median Household Income	\$39,647	\$71,481
Median Rent	\$1,000	\$1,466
Average Household Size	6.9	2.8
Foreign Born	39.8%	26.7%
Poverty Rate	29.9%	13.1%

⁴ Data adapted from:
<https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/City-Heights-Site-Analysis-and-Cultural-District-Feasibility-Study.pdf>