Chica Project (CP) is a Boston-based, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission to close the opportunity divide for Latinas and other Women of Color (WOC) by empowering them with the skills, confidence, and networks needed to thrive. Disrupting cycles of poverty, CP connects participants (ages 12-18) with a multigenerational network of powerful WOC who help challenge intersectional oppression and illuminate pathways to college and meaningful careers. Since its inception in 2011, 99% of CP participants have graduated from high school and enrolled in college.

Although COVID-19 is disrupting all of our lives, CP's culturally responsive team understands that public health crises disproportionately impact culturally-rich, but marginalized, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. While almost all participants come from low and moderate income families, COVID-19 has made their economic situations more tenuous. Many participants who held part-time jobs are no longer working, family members have gotten sick, and many parents have lost jobs, while those working often are on the frontlines with increased exposure to the coronavirus.

To better understand how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted CP participants and their families, CP conducted two surveys, each with 75+ respondents. In May of 2020, we administered Survey 1 (n=75) and in December of 2020 we administered Survey 2 (n=83). This Impact Report details our analysis of the survey results, underscoring the multiple ways that COVID-19 has harmed our participants’ social emotional wellbeing and reduced access to basic needs like housing, food, medicine, and education. Of particular interest is the way that “social distancing” has caused our young WOC to feel isolated and lonely, harming their mental health. Our internal study supports research conducted by the Center for American Progress which describes the multiple ways that COVID-19 has “exacerbated the already disparate mental health needs of BIPOC students.” Since shuttered schools had been “the primary provider of mental health resources [for these youth],” CP has adjusted our racial equity work by centralizing participants’ social-emotional needs. Our data analysis also has pushed us to prioritize economic security, food access, and basic needs support by: making emergency COVID-19 funds available to participants and their families and providing opportunities for participants to earn stipends through the launch of paid Peer Leadership and Youth Employment programs.

1 Quirk, Abby, 2020. Mental Health Support for Students of Color During and After the Coronavirus Pandemic - Center for American Progress
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## COVID-19 IMPACT REPORT

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SURVEY 1: May 2020

In May 2020, Chica Project sent out a self-designed, nine-question survey to 115 participants and recent alumni using Google forms. 75 participants completed the survey, a response rate of 65%. In this survey, we asked about their guardians’ and their own employment status and their access to the technology needed for the shift to virtual learning. Of the 75 respondents, we found:

- **51%** had at least one guardian who was laid off due to COVID-19
- **33%** were employed prior to the shutdown and **72%** of these respondents had their hours negatively impacted due to COVID-19

In terms of technology access during social distancing, we still found that:

- **95%** of respondents had a laptop
- **99%** had stable Wi-Fi

In response to what we learned from the survey, CP distributed over $10,000 to 75 participants and their families. Nearly half of these participants reported back on how they used the funds. The majority (56%) of recipients purchased groceries, while the rest used them for other basic necessities.

![Expenses Covered](image)

“**We were able to buy a new bed because 5 of us slept on one.**”
- CP Participant

“**The relief funds helped me keep my grandma and nephews healthy by getting them medication when they needed it.**”
- CP Participant

“**This helped me to buy some things that [my family] need because we are 6 members in my house and the only one who works is my mother and it has been very difficult for her in recent months.**”
- CP Participant
SURVEY 2: December 2020

In December 2020, we issued a second, more robust survey to further illuminate how COVID-19 was continuing to affect Chica Project participants. Survey 2 underscores the economic hardship, food insecurity and additional stress and anxiety that COVID-19 has caused Latinx and young Women of Color already challenged by intersectional oppression.

Respondent Demographics

A total of 83 participants completed this survey. All respondents are high school or college students, aged 13-19, who have participated in CPS programming. 100% identify as Latinas or young WOC and nearly 80% live in CP's priority communities of Boston, Lynn and Lawrence, MA. The ability to facilitate virtual programs has allowed us to reach youth from other Greater Boston communities who are currently out-of-state.

In addition to the household concerns shown in the graph, we also found that:

35% of respondents reported having difficulty accessing food regularly

46% of respondents experienced a change in their living situation
Employment

35% of respondents reported their guardians/parents had been laid off due to COVID-19. Of these 35%, more than half (55%) have not been able to secure another job or source of income.

"My brother hasn't been able to get a job and is struggling to pay his car bills. I've been trying to look for a job so I can save up for college next year. So now on top of this, my mom's been doing her best to be able to pay off all of her bills and debts as well as support my brother and I." - CP Participant

33% of participants who completed the December survey reported being employed before COVID-19 but nearly half of these respondents said that they were no longer employed. Out of the 18% (15 respondents) who were still employed, only three respondents were able to work from home and all of them had their hours reduced.

"I don't have a job anymore and it's so hard trying to look for one to provide for my family." - CP Participant
General Impact

In general, respondents expressed feelings of missing school or in-person programming. They described school related-stress and some noted the challenges of dealing with mental, physical, and financial hardships. When asked how life in general (life, work, school, etc.) has been since the beginning of the pandemic to now, they responded:

- It has gotten worse 47%
- It is about the same 23%
- It has gotten a little bit better 23%
- It has gotten much better 7%

“I have just been dealing with a lot and been extremely stressed out trying to hustle and make sure I get the future I want especially when I’m not feeling very motivated.”
- CP Participant

For those that expressed that things have gotten worse, we asked them to elaborate if they felt comfortable. These respondents shared reasons for feeling this way, such as unemployed guardians, unpaid utilities, increased stress, positive COVID-19 diagnosis, and loneliness.

Mental Health

When asked about their mental health in comparison to the start of COVID-19 several months earlier, participants replied:

- It has gotten much worse 14%
- It has gotten a little worse 29%
- It is about the same 38%
- It has gotten a little bit better 11%
- It has gotten much better 8%
While 43% of respondents reported their mental health worsening and 38% of them reported it being the same, 98% reported one or more of the following COVID-19 related experiences:

Given the trusting relationships that CP fosters with its youth, we believe they have answered the survey honestly, allowing us to collect accurate data. Here are two examples of youth being forthright about COVID-19’s impact on their lives.

“*I’m doing a lot better than I was in the first couple weeks of school. I just switched from remote learning to hybrid and I’m much less confused in my classes.*”  
- CP Participant

“*Well things have changed significantly at my moms house. Everyone has covid. I’m currently staying at my dad’s house. I’m waiting to go get retested so I can hopefully test negative again because I stayed at my moms for a couple of days and school is really hard. I’m constantly failing quizzes.*”  
- CP Participant

Despite these hardships, we inquired about healthy habits they are building, or intentional attempts at managing their mental health. The word cloud below captures their replies:

“I am doing daily affirmations and manifestations!”  
- CP Participant

“I tried to go outside and walk and do some exercises.”  
- CP Participant

“*I try to be more vocal about my feelings with my friends and family members.*”  
- CP Participant

“*Manteniendo el control de mis emociones*”  
- CP Participant

“*I’m doing daily affirmations and manifestations!*”  
- CP Participant
COVID-19 Prevention

The responses to the COVID-19 prevention questions echo broader public health racial disparities. Their answers also confirm the need to use a racial and gender justice lens and culturally responsive practices in CP's response to COVID-19.

![COVID-19 Testing](image-url)

- **46%** of respondents had not been tested as of December 2020
- Out of the 35 respondents that did get tested, **17%** tested positive.

- **70%** of respondents reported they personally knew someone who had tested positive for COVID-19
- **28%** reported not knowing if there were any COVID-19 testing sites accessible to them

CP participants live in multigenerational homes, with the majority of them in 3-6 member households. Given how these factors increase the likelihood of contracting the coronavirus, we have started ramping up COVID-19 prevention and response efforts. We are grateful for all of the community partners who have contributed resources that have enabled us to bring masks, sanitizer, and other prevention supplies to CP youth.

In addition to providing PPE, we have created a multilingual social media campaign to equip CP youth and their families with COVID-19 prevention and response tips.

- “Stop the Spread. Wear your Mask” (Haitian-Creole)
- “When should you wash your hands?” (Spanish)
92% of respondents were in school

- In-Person
- Online
- Hybrid
- Not in School

“It’s extremely hard. Teachers are bombarding the student with too much work. I am a senior now and I was completely clueless about the whole college process until my friend outside of school filled me in. Teachers are introducing new lessons everyday and I think they forget we students have been out of school for a long time. Instead of teaching new lessons they should help us with the whole college process, after all we won’t experience the same last year of high school like the one before us did.” - CP Participant

As participants transitioned into online learning, they most frequently used the term “difficult” to describe this experience.

“There is no transition as such. We have been in this world since birth. I am homeschooled and so are the other students. It’s hard not having a concrete schedule to get stuff done.” - CP Participant

“It has been a little difficult getting used to the online setting. Also, most days I am home alone so I have to take care of myself all day. It’s hard not having a concrete schedule to get stuff done.” - CP Participant

“It’s been difficult because I’m not seeing my teachers as often as I used to and it’s harder to go to them for assistance when I need some help.” - CP Participant
Participant Wishlist

In addition to sleep, returning to a physical school, and the ability to socialize again, CP participants’ wish lists included:

- Stable Internet (9)
- Computers (7)
- Desks & Chairs (2)
- Tutors
- School Supplies
- Access to Books

Respondents also requested printers, headphones, daily planners, and “motivation and socialization.”

“Since the pandemic things have changed with seeing family and loved ones. Missing extra activities cheer gymnastic basketball missing my friends some days I feel good but other days I feel down my family and I are waiting for this pandemic to be over and stop worrying about the unknown. We hope going into the new year my mom and dad continue to be employed and we all stay healthy.” - CP Participant

Conclusion

This report provides a snapshot of the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has harmed Latinx Girls and other young Women of Color in three Greater Boston communities, Lawrence, Lynn and Boston, MA participating in Chica Project, a mentoring, college readiness and girls empowerment initiative. CP participants and their families have faced COVID-19 employment, health, basic needs, and housing challenges. In two surveys, taken in May and December 2020, CP participants described increased feelings of anxiety and stress as social distancing has isolated them from their friends and supportive networks at school. For immigrant youth, the challenges are even greater, as many are rightfully afraid to seek public assistance during this moment of anti-immigrant sentiment where xenophobic action is disguised as public policy.

During COVID-19, CP has continued to provide mentoring, leadership development, and college and career readiness opportunities to participants. Responding to the specific ways that the coronavirus pandemic has both revealed and reinforced intersectional (race/class/gender) oppression. CP has shifted programming to explicitly confront the harmful impacts of COVID-19 on marginalized BIPOC people by:

- Providing access to emergency funds for basic needs
- Fostering social emotional wellness by shifting programming and mentoring online through CP’s “Virtual Village”
- Implementing new youth employment, and Peer Leader programs that provide critically needed stipends to participants
Most recently, we have designed and implemented a new micro-public health campaign to better inform young WOC about how to prevent COVID-19. For youth who typically receive public health information through school and also serve as cultural translators for the adults in their household, there is a pressing need to find effective methods for sharing information that can both quell the spread of COVID-19 (e.g. physical distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, etc.) and inform BIPOC families about the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine. In the first phase of this project, we prepared our Peer Leaders to become educators and advocates who learned to use linguistically appropriate and culturally responsive peer-to-peer practices, such as the use of social media, to educate peers and family on how to reduce the likelihood of contracting COVID-19.

Now, we are planning a second phase in which we train CP staff and Peer Leaders to help destigmatize the vaccine in communities in urban areas with a focus on educating Black and Latinx people about the vaccine’s safety and efficacy and how to go about getting it. On February 13th, we conducted a preliminary poll in which we found that 58% of respondents to the poll are unsure if they will get the COVID-19 vaccine when it is their turn. Additionally, 17% stated that they would not get vaccinated. CP’s effort to provide culturally responsive public health education is especially important given the racial inequities in vaccine distribution in MA.

According to the Boston Globe, there is a “dearth of state-run vaccination sites in hard-hit places such as Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, East Boston...[which] has frustrated and confounded infectious disease doctors and community advocates, who have seen the deadly virus run rampant for months in these predominantly Black and Latino communities.”

This has produced a situation in which, “of the more than 680,000 people who have received either one or two vaccine doses so far, just 3 percent are Black and less than 4 percent are Hispanic.” CPs work directly responds to the racial injustice that COVID-19 makes so apparent. In addition to our youth-led public health campaigns, CP is also taking a number of key actions to meet the increasing demand for our programming during these unprecedented times, which include:

- Distributing over $32,200 to the 83 survey respondents in stipends ranging from $300 to $500 based upon family need
- Expanding our paid Peer Leadership training program by providing stipends to 20 participants during the school year
- Doubling the number of participants earning stipends as youth employees during Summer of 2021 from 45 to 90
- Redesigning CP trainings to be laser-focused on anti-racism practices in order to provide an additional layer of mental and emotional support for our young Women during COVID-19

For any questions, or if you’d like to support CP youth please contact info@chicaproject.org

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2 Pan, D. and Hancock, J., 2021. In Suffolk County, Black and Latino residents face stark disparities in vaccine access - The Boston Globe.

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