



**Mikva
Challenge**

2020

**CHICAGO HOUSING
AUTHORITY YOUTH
COUNCIL**

CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY YOUTH COUNCIL



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CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY YOUTH COUNCIL

The Chicago Housing Authority Youth Council (CHA) is a group of young people from various areas of Chicago that strive to voice their opinions on addressing citywide issues. Most youth do not often get this opportunity to voice their opinions like this council does. This council values independence, justice, community, helping others, and liberation. Our vision is to improve the quality of life for all living in Chicago Housing Authority, especially young people. As CHA's impact on the community improves, more people will be proud to be CHA residents.

FRAMING QUESTION

How can CHA better reach youth residents by utilizing social media and the CHA website?

SUMMER SNAPSHOT

This summer we met with a variety of guests and came up with many great ideas over the course of 6 weeks. In our first week, we did activities to get to know one another within the council, and started to research and get data for the issues we wanted to recommend. Our first guest was Mrs. Cleopatra Draper from the National Public Housing Museum who gave us more facts and knowledge on housing. She also brought in guests like JR Fleming, who is with the Anti-Eviction Campaign, Ben Austen, who is the author of the book *High-Risers*, Marissa Novara, the Commissioner of Department of Housing for City of Chicago, and Mark Jaeschke and Shakira Johnson, who are also with the National Public Housing Museum. All of our guests gave us jewels on how to improve our recommendations and gave their experience with housing. They also gave us motivation, appreciation, and thorough answers to the many questions we had. We've gathered testimonies, data and research from CHA's website, and used personal or family experiences to make our recommendations stronger, in an effort to make change.

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Recommendation 1:

CHA Youth Speak!

In order to heighten awareness of youth employment opportunities, as well as increase youth engagement, CHA should collaborate with the CHA Youth Council to develop a monthly newsletter that highlights resources available to youth. We wish to create this newsletter for all CHA youth residents. This virtual newsletter aims to bring awareness to opportunities that CHA youth may not know about. This newsletter, tentatively titled *CHA Youth Speak!*, also looks to give a voice to CHA youth and provide them with a platform to speak what's on their mind in a productive manner. We would like it to be a monthly newsletter aimed at youth residents aged 13-24. The CHA Youth Council will be responsible for the writing of the newsletter, with support in editing, content, and presentation from the CHA Youth Opportunities team.

Research

According to CHA, in 2019, “2,432 CHA youth – from both public housing and Housing Choice Voucher families - participated in paid programming at 360 worksites across the city.” We believe this youth newsletter could help increase that number by publicizing more opportunities available to the CHA youth residents aged 13-24.

CHA's current quarterly newsletter is not written in youth-friendly language. Their April 2020 newsletter states *“In February, CHA announced that, for the 22nd consecutive year, it has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) in recognition of outstanding accounting and financial reporting and management. The Certificate of Achievement for the Fiscal Year 2018 is the highest form of recognition in government accounting and financial reporting and represents a significant accomplishment by a government agency and its fiscal management.”* This language is not very easily understood by young people, who will easily lose interest in the adult newsletter that currently exists, especially as there are rarely portions that are about young people in CHA.

We also learned from our other council members about being unaware of the current opportunities that exist in CHA. “Until I was a part of the Mikva youth council, I was unaware of the opportunities that CHA gives youth residents... Like scholarships, the youth summit, Learn and Earn, Springboard to Success, etc. If I had never joined the Mikva youth council, I would've never heard of all these opportunities that CHA provides. This newsletter could help kids like me that don't know about these opportunities, and these resources can branch out to other youth outside of CHA as well.”

“Youth rarely really receive information directly. It may go through parents, if that, so it'll be best to get youth emails so they can get the information and see all of the resources and opportunities that's available for them.” - **Guest testimony**

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Collaboration with CHA Youth Opportunities Team

CHA Youth Opportunities Team will actively partner and collaborate with the CHA Youth Council to develop a monthly newsletter that highlights resources available to youth and specifically target youth ages 13-24 through the distribution.

Action Step 2: Section Examples

Different sections may include: “What do you want to see from CHA?,” youth-conducted surveys, important youth-relevant news, as well as opportunities from outside CHA programs.

Action Step 3: Youth Stories

The newsletter should also include stories from youth throughout CHA programs on how these resources have supported them to show examples and create buy-in for other youth.

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(Continued) Recommendation 1:

CHA Youth Speak!

Action Step 4: CHA Collaborations

CHA Youth Opportunities Team will actively collaborate with the council to connect with different providers throughout CHA (for example, Education Team, Workforce Development Team, etc.) to access different youth in programming.

Action Step 5: Social Media Campaign

Social media campaign to target a wider range of youth, possibly through Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat; shared directly by FamilyWorks providers to assigned youth, emailed directly out by Youth Opportunities Team, etc.

[View the sample newsletter here.](#)

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Recommendation 2:

Professional Development + Workforce Readiness for a Greater Range of Youth

CHA should expand the range of youth services for professional and workforce development. The services should target youth aged 16-18 to prepare them for and expose them to job readiness skills.

Research

- There are a lot of resources around the 18-24 age range under CHA and through the city. This under-recognized age group of 16-18 youth doesn't have as much resources under CHA.
- The Great Cities Institute stated that "nearly 90% of black youth age 16-19 are jobless, figures that are, again, much higher than other major cities." This is a figure that is reflected throughout our city and youth ages 16-18 within CHA.
- Additionally, youth on the council experienced difficulties with completing their appropriate forms or acclimating to the standards of the workforce with this being their first exposure to the workforce.

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Collaboration with CHA Workforce Development Program

The CHA Youth Opportunities team, partnering with the Mikva Challenge Chicago Housing Authority Youth Council, should collaborate with the CHA Workforce Development program under the Resident Services' team in CHA to expand, reach, and target youth aged 16-18.

Action Step 2: Partnership with Retail Establishments

CHA Resident Services Team will partner with the existing retail establishments in high-need communities that also have a high youth population to reach 16-18 year-olds.

Action Step 3: Advertise Opportunities via CHA Youth Newsletter

Through the CHA Youth newsletter, CHA will advertise the opportunities available to youth aged 16-18 and promote the CHA Youth Council as one such opportunity.

Action Step 4: Job Readiness Tips for Youth

CHA Youth Opportunities Team, in partnership with the CHA Youth Council, will develop job readiness and workforce development tips for other youth, such as helping fill out tax forms like a W4 and how to prepare for a new job.

Action Step 5: Avenues to Target Youth

Some possible avenues for CHA to target youth aged 16-18: CHA Youth Newsletter, in collaboration with Family Works Providers.

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(Continued) Recommendation 2:

Professional Development + Workforce Readiness for a Greater Range of Youth

Youth Testimonies

Testimony 1

“Having a job before the age of 18 is very efficient. Not only does it give you more experience before you become an adult, but it also gives teenagers experience on how to fill out certain forms and have the skills they need to have when it’s time to go into the real world. It has helped me be able to fill out all the forms that I need to and do it correctly.” – Jalayla Dotson

Testimony 2

“Being in this group at 16 has led me to a greater understanding and development of the formal workspace I intend to have for my future! With being a youth council member for Mikva for this short amount of time, I have learned sooo many skills for the job force, from going to meetings with Mayor Lightfoot and simply filling out all my required forms for my first job as a cashier.” – Julian Barber

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References

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- ⁵ Chase, Brett. "Public housing residents kept in dark about toxic sites, report says." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1 July 2020, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/7/1/21310566/public-housing-cha-epa-shriver-hud>.
- ⁶ Dumke, Mick. "The Chicago Housing Authority Was Slow to Protect Residents During the Coronavirus Outbreak." *ProPublica*, 30 March 2020, <https://www.propublica.org/article/coronavirus-chicago-housing-authority-residents>.
- ⁷ Hagedorn, John M., Aspholm, Roberto, Córdova, Teresa, Papachristos, Andrew V., and Williams, Lance. "Chicago's gangs have changed. Our violence intervention strategies should too." *The Chicago Reporter*, 16 April 2019, <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/chicagos-gangs-have-changed-our-violence-intervention-strategies-should-too/>.
- ⁸ Hawthorne, Michael and Richards, Jennifer Smith. "Kids poisoned by lead in CHA housing; landlord still got paid." *Chicago Tribune*, 08 April 2017, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/investigations/ct-cha-lead-poisoning-20170406-story.html>.