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ASSESSMENT

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Memphis

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INTRODUCTION

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) is a youth development organization aimed at enabling youth to reach their fullest potential and ensuring the success of every child who enters the program (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, n.d.). Founded by four women - Mary Goodwin, Alice Goodwin, Elizabeth Hammersley, and Louisa Bushnell - in 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut, the organization was formed in the belief that boys roaming on the streets should have a better and more positive outcome. These women organized the first club in hopes of engaging boys' interests, promoting positive behaviors, and encouraging personal aspirations and goals. In 1990, the organization renamed itself to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) to acknowledge that girls can also play an important role in the organization.

The BGCA is designed to provide a safe space for healthy lifestyles, tutoring and homework help to support teens' academic achievements and foster good character and integrity in kids. Internally, BGCA youth outcome data state that 92% of the teens who go through BGCA are expected to graduate from high school, and 82% are expected to complete post-secondary education (Boys and Girls Club of America, n.d.). Extant academic research supports significant links between BGCA participation and youth outcomes.

The Boys Club of Memphis was proposed initially in 1955. In 1962, the first Boys Club of Memphis opened on South Barksdale in midtown Memphis. In 1993, the Boys Club of Memphis followed the lead of the national organization and became the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Memphis (BGCGM). And in 2000, BGCGM embarked on an aggressive campaign to renovate, construct, and establish new clubs and build a technical training center.

According to BGCGM, in 2024, more than 4,000 students participated in college tours, both virtual and in person. At the end of 2024, BGCGM counted 4,923 active participating students, 602 of whom were active high school senior participants in its school-based program, with a 100% graduation rate. (Of those 602 graduating seniors, according to BGCGM, 385 enrolled in college, 187 joined the workforce, and 30 joined the military.)

BGCGM's Workforce Development Program is designed to give participating youth the exposure, skills, and training needed for future jobs and careers. BGCGM has five workforce development pathways – logistics, automotive, culinary, welding, and IT. The program is also designed to emphasize financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking skills. According to BGCGM, in 2024, 93 students participated in virtual and workplace tours, 27 students completed the forklift driving test, 13 students completed NC3 introduction to welding certification, and 38 students received oil change certification.

This assessment first reviews research on BGCA generally, then provides a timeline and context for the evaluation of BGCGM. Results are discussed, with implications for the program and the greater Memphis community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have shown positive outcomes for youth participating in youth development programs (e.g., Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Enns et al. (2022) found that participation in BGCA produces better academic outcomes, as well as a decreased likelihood of justice system involvement in young adulthood and a decrease in the likelihood of teen pregnancy and STIs among adolescents. Additionally, Anderson-Butcher & Cash (2010) indicated that participation in BGCA decreases poor self-concept, which also decreases vulnerability and problem behaviors. In addition to higher self-concept, McGarrie et al. (2022) also discovered that mentoring services delivered by paid staff resulted in a higher likelihood of mentored youth returning to the clubs the following year and a lower likelihood of being involved in physical fights with their peers.

Other research has focused on positive life outcomes not related to criminal justice outcomes. One study found that the clubs helped the alumni develop several positive character traits and leadership skills, such as sportsmanship, honesty, trust, dependability, confidence, and kindness (Swigert & Boyd, 2010). Swigert & Boyd (2010) specifically explored one of the many programs offered by BGCGM, the Keystone Club, which provides leadership development opportunities for teens. Through this program, alumni learn leadership and character traits and participate in leadership retreats, conferences, service projects, and the Youth of the Year program.

Overall, the majority of the older studies on BGCGM highlight the importance of this organization and the positive outcomes that it produces for children. However, not all programs nationally have been empirically assessed, including BGCGM. The current study provides an initial assessment to address this gap in the literature through a process assessment of the program's development, evolution, and current status.

CURRENT STUDY

Location Focus

BGCGM operates sites within schools, churches, and separate site locations. BGCGM operates through five core program areas: 1) character and leadership development; 2) education and career development; 3) health and life skills; 4) the arts; and 5) sports, fitness, and recreation. These serve as the guiding principles for their comprehensive programming and are tools to help build the core character needs of the youth within the program. Through daily activities and initiatives offered by each club, the programs aim to promote positive outcomes and reinforce essential skills. Within each of the five core program areas, each one has various programs that are offered to active youth.

Despite apparent success, BGCGM has yet to be formally evaluated, either internally or externally. A process evaluation aimed towards the progress of the program's development and implementation is helpful since there have been multiple administrative changes over the past several years. Focusing on a process evaluation approach, the current assessment examined the current operations, internal practices, and program delivery of BGCGM. Without access to outcome-level data on youth participants, the evaluation concentrated on understanding how services are implemented across sites and identifying areas of strength and opportunity within the organization. The evaluation was designed to gather insight from multiple sources, including interviews and focus groups with BGCGM leadership and staff, direct site observations, and internal documents. In this way, the evaluation provided an extensive review and assessment of program process, operational consistency, and internal capacity.

Data

The data used in this evaluation came from three primary sources: 1) internal program data; 2) focus groups; and 3) site visits. BGCGM shared internally collected data including various reporting documents, the program descriptions offered within the clubs, and demographic variables on the participants within these clubs. The data were reviewed to better understand the organization's existing monitoring practices and programs. In addition, four focus groups were conducted with Boys and Girls Clubs directors and organizational leadership. To recruit volunteers for the focus groups, staff were invited to participate in an all-staff meeting. During this meeting, the purpose of the focus groups was explained, emphasizing the importance of their input in shaping the evaluation. These sessions were aimed at gathering perspectives on daily operations, the challenges faced by various staff positions, and the perceived program impact on the youth in the program. The conversations were semi-structured, guided by a consistent set of open-ended questions, and were recorded for thematic analysis. Finally, five Boys and Girls Clubs locations were selected for in-person site visits. These visits allowed for direct observation of program environments, interactions between staff and youth, and a better understanding of how programming is delivered at the site level. The five site visits were selected by the Executive Director of the BGCGM to ensure a complete snapshot of the various styles of operations. Locations were intentionally chosen to reflect the variety of club types within the network, including school-based sites, standalone clubs, and specialty programs.

Evaluation Strategy

There are two key questions that guide a process evaluation: (1) whether a program is reaching the appropriate target population and (2) whether its service delivery and support functions are consistent with program design specification or other appropriate standards (Rossi et al., 2004). A process evaluation provides diagnostic value by identifying if program impact, or lack thereof, was due to implementation failure (e.g., intended services not provided) or theory failure (e.g., program was implemented correctly but failed to produce expected effects). If positive impacts are found, this evaluation will confirm results are due to the program itself and not spurious sources, and it can help identify the aspects of services most important in producing desired effects.

Analysis

Data collected through focus groups were analyzed in two stages. Focus groups are the preferred solution to replace surveys as they provide multiple advantages. First, by allowing the scope of conversation to go beyond several planned questions, they can capture more nuanced and detailed responses on issues, as well as highlight additional benefits (or concerns) of and with their experiences to be more open and honest in their responses and provide a venue for adding their voices beyond the limited scope of the administrative processes and changes. They provide the ability to obtain a deeper understanding of contextual factors related to these topics by allowing study subjects to engage with the researcher in a conversation rather than only permitting them to respond to pre-determined survey questions. Taped focus group interviews were transcribed through the Sonix transcription software service; transcriptions were used as the data for analysis.

Researchers analyzed transcripts with a “word cloud” generator and content analysis to identify themes and issues of importance to participants. Participants were identified individually within groups, but responses were collated for each focus group and reviewed by group, then across groups. The word cloud generator visually represented words used most frequently within each focus group. Generally, the size of the word in the image represents the frequency with which that word was spoken in the session; larger words were spoken more.

Finally, site visits were conducted by the lead researcher across multiple locations and site types. Site visits were conducted across multiple weeks and lasted one hour per visit. The researcher was accompanied by a staff member who provided a tour and context for the location along with answering any questions by the researcher. Sites were selected strategically to reflect a mix of traditional club locations and school-based locations, ensuring a diverse range of service models. Following each visit, field notes were used to capture the findings of each site visit. These observations were not analyzed by themselves; they were integrated with the other data sources to enhance the reliability of analysis.

RESULTS

Internal Organization Data

BGCGM has a multi-tiered leadership staffing structure that oversees the entire mission and programming. The organization is led by a 24-member board which helps steer the direction, fundraising efforts, and policymaking of BGCGM. In addition, a 31-member advisory board offers guidance, community insight, and professional expertise to enhance organizational effectiveness. Day-to-day operations are led by a six-person Senior Leadership Team which is comprised of members such as the Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Chief Operating Officer. These members are responsible for establishing goals, developing policies, allocating budgets, and designing programs that are aligned with the organization's mission. In addition, BGCGM is further supported by 27 full-time management professional staff which oversees administrative functions and program coordination.

While its structure appears healthy on paper, internal data and staff feedback suggest that several sites are experiencing strain due to staffing shortages, particularly in the youth development team. During site visits and focus groups, staff frequently cited challenges in maintaining enough help and retaining experienced staff due to compensation and workload concerns. Qualitative feedback indicated that several part-time roles are difficult to fill and keep filled, resulting in heavier workloads for existing staff. Taken together, the existing leadership and staffing infrastructure provides a strong foundation, but ongoing staffing challenges suggest a need for targeted investment in recruitment, retention, and staff development strategies. Additional clarity in role expectations and consistent support from upper management may help alleviate pressure and improve consistency in program quality across club locations.

The National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI) is a comprehensive data collection and analysis survey developed by BGCA to help local clubs measure their impact, evaluate current programing, and help push for improvements. At the core of NYOI is an annual youth survey administered each spring, which captures participants' perceptions of their club experience. The survey assesses areas such as emotional and physical safety, supportive relationships, a sense of belonging, and access to meaningful opportunities. The overall sentiment of the 2024 NYOI results for BGCGM is strongly positive. The data came from the results of 838 participants across 19 sites within the BGCGM. No

demographics or identifying information was collected from the respondents to ensure their anonymity. Table 1 shows some of the highlighted responses that are discussed in the remainder of this section.

Table 1. Selected Responses From the 2024 National Youth Outcomes Initiative

	Optimal (Doing Great)	Fair (Doing Fine)	Needs Improvement (Room to Grow)	
Safe Positive Environment	-	-	-	
Emotional Safety	94%	5%	2%	
Physical Safety	89%	7%	3%	
Fun & Belonging	-	-	-	
Sense of Belonging	88%	8%	4%	
Good Character & Citizenship Measures	-	-	-	
Conflict Resolution Skills	23%	31%	46%	
	Very True	Sort of True	Not Very True	Not True at All
Safe & Positive Environment Items	-	-	-	-
I feel safe being myself at this Club.	86%	11%	2%	1%
Supportive Relationship Items	-	-	-	-
The adults at this club care about me.	86%	12%	2%	1%
Adults here listen and understand what I have to say.	80%	17%	2%	1%
I can talk to an adult at this Club if I have a problem.	83%	14%	2%	1%
Kids here are nice to each other.	58%	33%	6%	3%
Kids here can count on each other.	63%	29%	6%	3%
Fun & Belonging Items	-	-	-	-
I enjoy coming to this Club.	82%	15%	2%	0%
People at this Club accept me for who I am.	88%	10%	1%	1%
Recognition Items	-	-	-	-
Adults at this Club notice when I try my best.	78%	18%	2%	1%
Adults here encourage me when I make positive choices.	82%	15%	2%	1%
Opportunities & Expectations Items	-	-	-	-
The adults at this Club believe that I will be a success.	86%	11%	1%	1%
	No	Yes		
Stay Away Items	-	-		
Did you ever stay away from the entrance of the Club because you thought someone might harm you there?	89%	11%		
Did you ever stay away from any hallways in the Club because you thought someone might harm you there?	91%	9%		
Did you ever stay away from other places at the Club because you thought someone might harm you there?	91%	9%		
Did you ever stay away from any restrooms in the Club because you thought someone might harm you there?	90%	10%		
<i>Average</i>	90.25%	9.75%		
Bullying Items	-	-		
During the past year, have you been bullied at the Boys & Girls Club?	94%	6%		
College/Career Preparation (11th or 12 Grade Only) Items	-	-		
Applied for any post secondary education. (12th Grade Only)	9%	91%		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
College/Career Preparation (11th or 12 Grade Only) Items	-	-	-	
I know what education or training I will need for the career I want. (11th to 12th Grade Only)	58%	38%	4%	0%
I know what costs to expect for the education or training I will need after high school. (11th to 12th Grade Only)	49%	41%	8%	1%

The results reflected a supportive, engaging, and safe environment where youth felt valued and connected to both peers and adult mentors. Across nearly every domain of the 'Club Experience' the majority of members reported high levels of satisfaction and perceived benefits. The respondents overwhelmingly reported feeling safe at club locations, both emotionally and physically. 94% said they felt emotionally safe, 89% reported feeling physically safe, and 86% stated they felt safe being themselves. These findings highlight BGCGM's success in creating an environment where members are protected and feel safe to express themselves. Supportive relationships also emerged as a key strength, with 86% of members reporting that adults at the club care about them, 83% saying they can talk to adults if they have a problem, and 80% stating that adults listen to and understand what they have to say. These connections are essential in being able to build trust and emotional security for youth in the program.

A strong sense of belonging and enjoyment was also shown. 88% of youth felt that they were accepted for who they are, 86% reported a strong sense of belonging, and 82% said they enjoyed coming to their club. Recognition and encouragement from the adults present were also commonly noted, with 82% of members saying they are encouraged when they make positive choices and 78% stating that adults notice when they try their best. Members also reported high levels of opportunities, with 86% agreeing that adults believe in their potential to succeed. The clubs also demonstrated a high effectiveness in maintaining a safe environment, where 94% of youth reported that they were not bullied while being at a club, and over 90% said they have not avoided any areas of the club due to fear of harm.

While the overall sentiment of the 2024 NYOI results is strongly positive, several areas are seen as opportunities for growth and refinement. Notably, peer-to-peer relationships scored lower than adult-youth interactions. Only 58% of youth reported that kids are nice to each other, and just 63% felt that they could count on their peers. These findings suggest that while the clubs excel in adult mentorship and support, additional focus may be needed to foster peer dynamics and inclusive youth-led activities. Conflict resolution also emerged as a key area for improvement. Only 23% of youth rated their conflict resolution skills as "doing great," while 46% fell into the "needs improvement" category. This represents the lowest scoring domain in the NYOI survey and highlights a possible need in social-emotional learning.

In the area of college and career readiness, many youth demonstrated strong engagement, with 91% of 12th graders reported applying to a post-secondary institution.

However, there were still gaps in knowledge and planning. Only 58% of older teens reported knowing what education or training they needed for their desired career, and 49% said they understand the costs involved. These responses suggest a need for greater support in post-secondary planning, future goal setting, and financial literacy.

Focus Groups with Staff and Leadership

Table 2 provides a summary of word clouds from focus groups across each of the four sessions, separated by date.

Table 2. Summary of Word Clouds from Focus Groups

Group	Most Common Words
Group 1 – February 18	program, resources, location
Group 2 - February 27	program, community, resources
Group 3 – March 4	program, assessment, challenge
Group 4 – March 6	program, organization, marketing, funding

Although word clouds can identify potential areas of concern based on raw numbers of word usage, they offer no context. As a result, researchers conducted thematic content analysis of each transcript to identify common themes of discussion. To account for possible variations in the subjective interpretation of the transcript output, two researchers separately reviewed each transcript to identify codes and themes from the interviews (Stretsky, Shelley, Hogan & Unnithan, 2010).

Each of the transcripts from the focus group sessions were reviewed individually and then grouped to report commonalities in findings across the series. Overall, content analyses identified three core themes: 1) core strengths of BGCGM programs; 2) barriers to program operations and delivery; and 3) the need for community partnership. Each of these are represented in separate figures and discussed in further detail below.

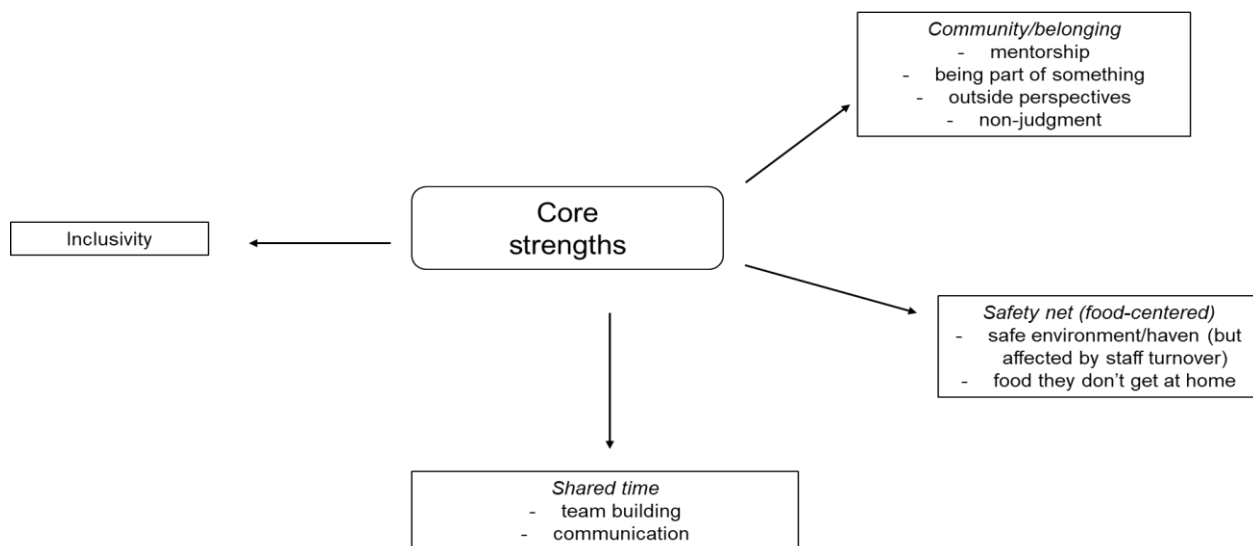


Figure 1. Theme: Core strengths

Figure 1 shows that core strengths of the BGCGM programming were identified as inclusivity, shared time, community/belonging, and safety net. Staff felt that the programming met kids where they were but also offered team building and communication to shore up relationships. Within the area of community and belonging, the mentorship offered by staff (especially those with long-term involvement) helped foster a sense of inclusion, offering youth non-judgmental support and valuable outside perspectives. Staff members indicated that one of the greater strengths of the program was the ability to provide a physically and emotionally safe space where youth can grow and express themselves without judgment. Staff have been pushed to help foster an inclusive, non-judgmental atmosphere to help active members feel protected and supported. Having caring and dedicated staff provides positive role models who build meaningful relationships with youth and contribute to a supportive club culture. The club is often seen as a “second home” where each member belongs. During their time within the club, these youth often build lasting friendships, build social skills, and engage with positive social behavior.

Programs within the clubs were seen as addressing a wide range of needs, ranging from academic support and emotional development to career readiness and creative expression. Food was a central theme of the safety net discussion by providing food kids didn't get at home and a safe environment and haven they could turn to. Kids were

especially engaged in programs that dealt with cooking and involved food offerings. BGCGM provides daily meals and snacks, which is especially impactful for youth facing food insecurity. Many of the youth within the program qualify for the reduced-price meals within the Memphis Shelby County Schools. Several staff members noted that, for many of the youth, the food provided during club hours is often their last meal of the day.

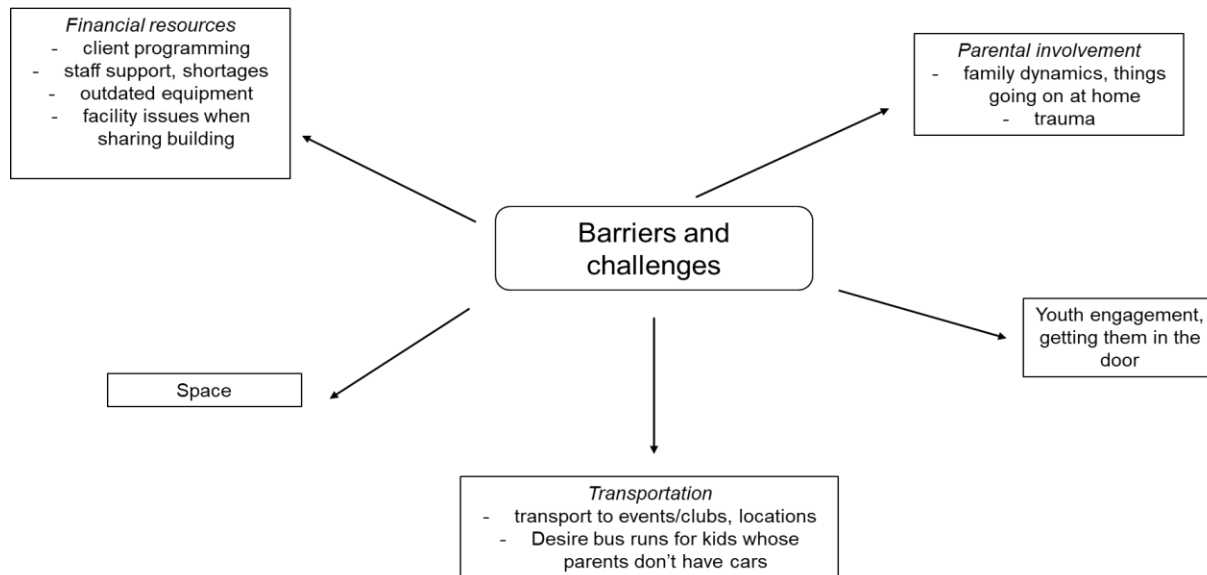


Figure 2. Theme: Barriers and challenges

Figure 2 also illustrates how staff also identified barriers and challenges to program operations and delivery. The most extensive discussion included the dearth of financial resources. Staff at multiple groups discussed the lack of funding for various youth programming, and how lack of staff support and staff shortages contributed to fewer resources able to be offered to their youth. While staff continue to do more with less, funding shortages have limited BGCGM’s ability to expand programs, upgrade equipment, or provide incentives to retain staff. The expiration of large funding streams has led to uncertainty about sustaining programs and has already resulted in the closure of nine clubs.

Space, or lack thereof, was also discussed as a separate issue, particularly when serving larger groups. They also cited outdated equipment for operations, as well as facility issues when sharing the building (e.g., for school and church-based sites). Transportation to events/clubs and off-site locations was discussed as a need, with staff indicating a

desire for bus runs for kids whose parents did not have consistent transportation. The loss of buses and reliable transportation has significantly impacted access to clubs, particularly for those who attend clubs that are not embedded at local schools. This also limits participation in field trips, technical training programs, and other off-site enrichment opportunities. Lack of parental involvement was also highlighted as an issue, with family dynamics, issues going on at home, and trauma all affecting the youth seen at BGCGM sites. Finally, youth engagement was discussed, with staff indicating that getting kids in the door of programming was the most difficult step in keeping youth engaged.



Figure 3. Theme: Need for community partnership

Finally, Figure 3 shows how staff at multiple locations all identified the need for community partnerships as crucial in keeping program operations running. While BGCGM has strong community support in principle, many partnerships were deemed as inconsistent or one-time engagements. BGCGM needs more sustained collaborations with local businesses, training centers, and various other community organizations to better support its mission. Specifically, the need for strategy in capital campaigns and fundraising, as well as the necessity for grant and external funding, was a topic of much discussion. Strong leadership was simultaneously identified as a need in this regard, with a focus on innovation and communication, particularly with so many staff and

leadership turnovers. Staff reported challenges with internal communication – including unclear instructions, over-reliance on email or text, and assumptions without direct clarification. Improved communication protocols, especially with recent changes within leadership, would help with coordination and planning.

Finally, staff indicated that collaboration with local neighborhoods and businesses was needed to (1) increase awareness of services and offerings and (2) have community partners provide time and engagement through volunteering. Although there are many success stories coming out of each club, its accomplishments are often retained within the club walls. There remains little public awareness among stakeholders, elected officials, or even the broader community. A stronger marketing strategy would be beneficial to not only increase visibility but to attract more support from community organizations.

Site Visit Observations

Site visits were conducted at five BGCGM locations to gain a deeper understanding of how the programming is implemented and to see the club during the times that the youth are active there. These visits offered insight into how the club operates daily, the physical environments of the club location, and some of the activities that are offered at each location. The five sites have been divided into two categories: 1) “Site-Based Partner Sites,” which are housed within other organizations such as schools or churches; and 2) “Traditional Club Sites,” which operate out of standalone BGCGM facilities. The observations and staff interactions helped identify key themes related to staffing, engagement, resource use, and overall program delivery.

Three of the clubs visited were site-based partner sites, which represent a model where the BGCA programming is inserted within existing community institutions. While these partnerships offer clear advantages in terms of accessibility and alignment with resources, they do present unique challenges due to space-sharing and additional constraints. Across these sites, club leadership consistently reported positive relationships with the host organizations. However, each site also identified challenges that primarily involved the physical space they were in and the limited autonomy over that space. For example, one site does not have access to a gym for the physical play component of their programming. Two sites mentioned that they occasionally have conflicts over room availability. While being allowed to operate within the space of a host organization, there are times that the primary occupant must occupy the space

allotted for BGCGM. Staff also reported that while programing remains consistent with the model provided by BGCA, the inability to build site-specific structures can often be a downside to these locations.

Several site-based strengths stood out during the visits. At two sites, youth are already on-site for school activities offering built-in recruitment and retention. This reduced the need for transportation and increases the attendance rate for the children, as well as allowing for easier communication with parents and caregivers. In school-based sites, several club staff also work for the school, allowing them to have more opportunities to support students academically, such as helping with homework that is directly tied to the school day material. The physical proximity of being within the school helps establish a stronger connection to academic needs and club support. School- and church-based sites also showed high levels of adaptability in navigating the shared space challenges. Youth were engaged and responsive, and the staff interactions that were observed were done so in a supportive and positive tone.

Some specific challenges were also noted. Although there were some signs directing families to the club entrances at each site, they were often small and intermittently spaced. Visibility and branding limitations may limit broader community awareness or create confusion for new members trying to access services. At site-based locations, there were often competing priorities with host organizations in terms of scheduling or space conflicts, especially during school or church programming. While these issues are usually resolved through communication, they do have the potential to disrupt consistency with programming flow. In addition to this, since these spaces are borrowed rather than owned, staff cannot modify rooms in meaningful or permanent ways. This prevents the creation of site-specific enhancements that are more common at traditional club sites. Finally, because club staff are working within another institution's structure, access control, particularly with safety protocols, can be limited. For instance, one site mentioned concerns about not having visibility over who is attempting to access the primary entrance door, exposing a desire for enhanced security features. In addition, two of the sites visited operate as standalone BGCGM facilities. These traditional sites are housed within their own dedicated buildings that are run by BGCGM. As such, they can morph their environments to meet the needs of the youth and are able to use the rooms in their locations as they want. Compared to site-based partner locations, the traditional sites featured significantly larger facilities with rooms dedicated for specific functions, such as academic support, technology, and STEM labs. These dedicated spaces allow for more intentional programming and allow for certain

styles of customization. Both sites had recently renovated spaces and donated items, both of which help their ability to deliver a wide range of enrichment activities. Staff at these sites followed the same operational model observed across the other clubs and maintained a strong, supportive engagement with youth participants. The youth engagement was consistent with other club sites, indicating that the physical space and program variety did not necessarily produce a higher participation.

Several strengths were particularly noticed at these locations. Having full control over their environment, these club locations were able to design specific programming that allowed them to build on additional interests and needs of their members. The standalone nature of these facilities also allowed for stronger club identity, with clear BGCGM branding throughout the space. In addition, without having to navigate sharing a space, traditional sites also benefit from operational stability. Programming could be carried out without the need to relocate the activities or adjust their priorities.

However, traditional sites also faced unique challenges. Because these sites are not embedded within schools or other community institutions, they face greater challenges in recruiting and retaining youth. Transportation, neighborhood reach, and visibility all become more important in maintaining attendance. The availability of having more developed spaces may unintentionally create disparities across the various site locations. Unlike partner sites that may benefit from host organization support, standalone clubs are solely responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their buildings. This can create burdens when addressing unplanned repairs, with some sites being able to more quickly address issues than others.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based off the internal documentation provided by BGCGM, site visits, and the staff focus groups, the following recommendations have been identified. First, increase visibility and branding at partner sites. Installing clear and consistent branded materials at partner locations helps strengthen community awareness of the various club locations around Memphis. This also helps reinforce organizational identity among the staff and youth at each club site.

Second, strengthen marketing by launching a strategic marketing campaign that focuses on the impact of stories, the voices of the youth, and donor engagement. By

providing tools such as a “donation menu” like other known non-profit organizations (e.g., \$25 provides 10 meals, \$50 covers a field trip), BGCGM is more likely to net small-dollar donors. Success stories should also be promoted to the media, city leaders, and corporate sponsors to increase awareness and funding opportunities.

Third, BGCGM must invest in staffing and retention. That is, BGCGM must offer consistent training and onboarding, especially for new hires and youth professional development staff, as well as looking for additional ways to provide professional development opportunities and recognition (e.g., staff appreciation days, and leadership tracks).

A fourth recommendation focuses on building transportation access. With the closure of nine clubs (primarily the ones embedded within schools, BGCGM should secure funding or partnerships to restore regular van/bus services to help with youth who may be looking for a new club to attend. This can be done by also exploring community-based transportation partnerships with local businesses or the school district.

Two final recommendations focus on strategy. The fifth recommendation is to deepen and sustain community partnerships. While large scale corporate sponsors are needed, it may be beneficial to aim for neighborhood-based partners which can contribute time or resources to a nearby club. Creating “partnership menus” may also allow for these groups to select specific needs that they can support such as tutoring or guest speaking.

The sixth and final recommendation is to promote cross-site collaboration and knowledge sharing by creating structured opportunities for sites to learn from one another through regular meetings or other collaborative events that can help foster innovation across the network of clubs. This also gives club leaders a chance to express specific issues they may be facing, in hopes that another club leader has had similar experiences.

CONCLUSION

BGCGM continues to play a vital role in supporting youth across the city through safe and enriching programming. The assessment findings indicate that BGCGM offers a strong foundation for positive youth development by providing safe environments, academic support, access to meals, and diverse programming opportunities that range from STEM and arts to life skills and career readiness. These efforts show a deep commitment to meeting the needs of young people in Memphis, where creating a safe space for growth and self-exploration is crucial.

The strengths that were identified across data sources highlight the dedication of staff, the intentionality behind the offered programming, and the responsiveness of BGCGM to its community. Youth benefit from having supportive relationships with staff and exposure to new experiences. The clubs' impact is especially notable in their ability to help these youth feel connected, heard, and that they belong to an organization that supports them in all aspects of life. At the same time, the assessment notes several areas for continued growth, including strengthening BGCGM's visibility and message, enhancing consistency in program delivery across locations, and addressing staff recruitment and retention challenges, especially in the face of limited resources. BGCGM recently announced that it is closing nine high school sites due to the depleted funds provided by a COVID-19 relief grant (Royer, 2025). This decision will have an impact on more than 3,500 local students. An immediate challenge is how to address that impact.

This paper provides a process assessment of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Memphis. Internal program data, focus group interviews, and site visits all identified core strengths, barriers, and challenges of the program in delivering services to at-risk youth in Memphis and Shelby County. While there is much to celebrate, there also remains much work to be done.

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