

A Model for Safety and Justice

Filipino Youth Experiences and Outcomes in a
Children's Rights Organization-Run Residential Center



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Executive Summary

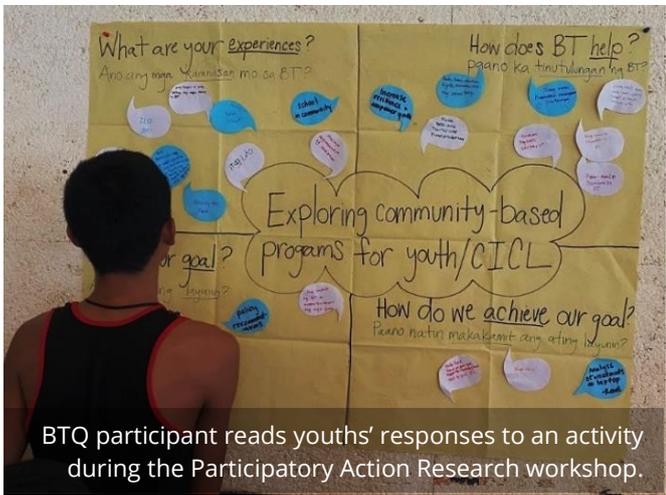
The Philippines’ 2006 Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act established responses to Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) that promote education and community-based interventions (RA 9344, 2006). This landmark was later revised to require local governments to develop and maintain youth facilities called *Bahay Pag-asas* (RA 10630, 2013).

Bahay Tuluyan Quezon (BTQ), a rights-based residential center for boys, serves a blended population of CICL and Children at Risk. Its site features align with recommendations that facilities reflect a home-like setting (AECF, 2014, p.159). CICL make up 29.41 percent of all BTQ participants since January 2021 (BT, 2023c). Length of stay averaged 4.52 years among youth discharged from BTQ within the past two years, while the average for discharged CICL was 2.71 years. As of January 2023, 19 youth¹ live at BTQ with an average age of 16.9 years old (BT, 2023c). Common life experiences among participants include exposure to trauma, violence, and poverty.

Bahay Tuluyan became my family and the one who helped me. They became my source of strength even though it is hard for me.

“Iyong Bahay Tuluyan family talaga ang tumulong sa akin. Ang naging sandalan ko, kahit na mahirap.”

- BTQ Participant



Bahay Tuluyan measures changes in participants’ resilience – the capacity to overcome challenges and sustain wellness – through the Child and Youth Resilience Measure, a survey completed by participants every six months (RRC, 2022). On average, youth in BTQ between January 2021 and December 2022 had a statistically significant increase (6.83%, p=0.01) in their overall resiliency score (BT, 2023). This study evaluates program outcomes and explores daily life for youth at BTQ.

In November 2022, 17 BTQ participants (89.5 percent of the population) engaged in peer-led data collection² activities (Data Day, 2022). Data collection design focused

on key program areas: farming, independent living skills, children's rights training, youth leadership, relationship-building, and education in the local community.

Key findings include:

- Youth report an average 10.33 percent increase in **resilience** related to psychological caregiving (BT, 2023).
- 93.33 percent of BTQ youth discharged in the past two years are involved in **work or education** (BT, 2023c).
- 9 out of 10 youth responses referenced **relationships** as a reason they feel happy at BTQ (Data Day, 2022).
- Youth rank **children’s rights** highest among key program as an important part of daily life (Data Day, 2022).
- When participants were asked to discuss a time when they learned something new, 81.82 percent (18) of responses referenced **farming**, making it the most significant theme for this question (Data Day, 2022).
- Recommendations for regular **family contact** and youth placement reviews can improve BTQ programming.

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¹ “Youth” is used broadly throughout this report to refer to children, youth, and young adults up to age 25.
² Quotes throughout the report highlight youth perspectives shared during the BTQ Youth Data Day. While meaning is preserved, Tagalog-to-English translations may not be exact. See Research Methods on page 3 for more details.

Research Methods

This research project was developed through immersion and collaboration. I lived on-site as a volunteer at BTQ from June 2022 through March 2023. During this 9-month period, I engaged with youth and staff daily, facilitated activities, supported program development, and captured ethnographic observations in a field journal. This community-building process provided a strong foundation for Participatory Action Research (PAR).

PAR is an approach to research that requires meaningful partnership with individuals directly impacted by the research topic (MacDonald, 2012). PAR recognizes the value of lived expertise and aims to engage community members to best address their needs. At the project outset, I met with Bahay Tuluyan leadership and staff to discuss participants' needs, program challenges, and relevant information gaps that may affect policies in the Philippines. This stakeholder input narrowed the research topic to youths' experiences and outcomes in the BTQ program. In August 2022, two months after beginning to build trusting relationships with BTQ participants, I facilitated a PAR workshop during which 20 youth reflected on their personal needs for safety, health, and well-being through structured activities. I then established a research team using PAR principles. In September 2022, 10 BTQ participants applied for Youth Research Assistant (YRA) positions, which offered hourly compensation. Five youth, aged 15-20, were selected based on their interest in research and supporting youth like themselves. From October 2022 to February 2023, I met regularly with the YRAs to:

1. Establish a research question, key program areas, and shared values for our research team.
2. Provide training on youth justice, research methods, data collection, and focus group facilitation.
3. Plan a data collection event, during which we would conduct activities with current BTQ participants.
4. Gather data from the YRAs by facilitating the data collection activities in a separate meeting after the event.
5. Conduct thematic analysis as a team by reviewing participants' transcribed responses to analyze findings.

BTQ Youth Data Day ("Data Day"), the data collection event, was held on November 30, 2022. We designed activities to explore our descriptive research question: *What is life like for participants at BTQ?* Following a brainstorm session with the YRAs, I developed an event agenda and plans for our agreed-upon activities. YRAs then provided feedback for finalization. On the Data Day, 12 youth participated in data collection activities facilitated and recorded³ by the YRAs who were required to maintain objectivity. Since the five YRAs constitute a significant portion of the small BTQ participant population (n=19), we decided it was important to include them in the final data sample. Following the event, I held a separate meeting during which I facilitated data collection activities and the YRAs served as respondents. In total, 17 youth⁴ are represented in the data set. Data Day activities included:

- Kwentuhan (storytelling) groups about significant moments at BTQ (e.g., arrival, holidays)
- Question booth in which youth reflected on BTQ experiences (e.g., a time you felt happy, sad)
- Target survey to visually capture youths' opinions about six key program areas⁵ on a 5-point scale.
- Vision board collage-making to explore participants' life goals after they leave BTQ.

This report also analyzes demographic data of 34 youth who participated in BTQ in the past two years (January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2022) and Child and Youth Resilience Measure assessments of 27 of those youth. Assessments are completed by youth every six months, providing significant insights (See Program Outcomes on page 7).

Potential limitations include response biases among participants in the Data Day and CYRM assessments. These include acquiescence, social desirability, or courtesy bias in interviews, focus groups, or assessments. For example, I observed high ratings during self-reporting by youth in initial CYRM assessments, which did not reflect known circumstances. Additionally, both the CYRM and Target survey activity rely on a 5-point Likert scale, in which extreme reporting (a tendency to choose 1 or 5) may affect responses. Lastly, language was a limitation addressed during research design and implementation. As an English speaker with limited Tagalog abilities working with a predominantly Tagalog-speaking population, written materials were translated and BTQ staff provided translation support during meetings.

³ Audio recordings captured during qualitative data collection were later transcribed and translated for analysis.

⁴ Informed consent was obtained from youth before their participation in any data collection activities.

⁵ Key program areas were established by the research team as the basis for qualitative data collection: children's rights, education, farming, independent living, relationships, and youth leadership.

FREQUENTLY USED ACRONYMS

- **AFC: Alternative Family Care** is a program run by Bahay Tuluyan that provides short- and long-term care at residential centers for children and youth who lack safe home environments.
- **ALS: Alternative Learning System** is an educational program in the Philippines that includes technical training and serves students for whom traditional schooling is not a suitable fit.
- **BTQ: Bahay Tuluyan Quezon** is a rights-based residential center for boys who require out-of-home placement for a safe and supportive environment.
- **CAR: Children at Risk** are children and youth who are at risk of law contact due to adversity such as exposure to abuse, violence, trauma, and poverty.
- **CICL: Children in Conflict with the Law** are youth over age 15 involved in the criminal legal system, including those arrested, convicted, diverted, detained, or placed in an institution.
- **CYRM: Child and Youth Resiliency Measure** is an international research-based assessment consisting of 28 questions to capture self-reported resilience across individual, relational, communal, and cultural components.
- **JJWA: Juvenile Justice Welfare Act** is 2006 Philippines legislation establishing responses to CICL aligned with youth development and restorative justice.
- **LGU: Local Government Units** are the Philippines' provinces and highly urbanized cities, which are jurisdictions responsible for local policy decisions.
- **NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations** are nonprofit organizations that operate independent from any government.
- **PAR: Participatory Action Research** is an approach that meaningfully engages individuals impacted by a research topic throughout the process. PAR emphasizes community partnership and responsibility.

Policy Background

In the Philippines, CICL refers to youth between age 15 and 18 when they became involved in the criminal legal system—including those arrested, diverted, detained, or sentenced to an institution (PNP, 2016). CICL are primarily male youth, often from families experiencing poverty and/or domestic violence (JJCICSI, 2016).

The Philippines' 2006 Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act (JJWA) established a network of responses to law contact among youth. The landmark law emphasized education, restorative justice, and community-based interventions (RA 9344, 2006). Additionally, the JJWA set the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 15, which protects younger children from law contact.

In 2013, legislators passed an amendment to the JJWA to create youth facilities intended to rehabilitate and reintegrate CICL into their communities (RA 10630, 2013). Local Government Units (LGUs) are required to establish and maintain *Bahay Pag-asas*, which are 24-hour youth facilities that house CICL awaiting court disposition or transfer to other facilities (RA 10630, 2013).

LGUs are central to JJWA implementation. Under the law, LGUs or qualified non-government organizations (NGOs) monitored by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) can operate *Bahay Pag-asas* (RA 10630, 2013). As of July 2022, 96 out of 114 mandated *Bahay Pag-asas* are in operation, a significant jump from the 37 operational facilities reported in December 2020 (Gutierrez, 2022; PCIJ, 2022). Notable barriers to JJWA implementation include weak commitment by LGUs and lack of capacity by system duty bearers, including social workers and court officials (Yang, 2015).

In 2020, nearly 15,900 youth were arrested in the Philippines (PCIJ, 2022). Nearly 60 percent (9,502) of CICL that year were referred to DSWD or Local Social Welfare and Development Officers, 15 percent were returned to their families, and 11 percent were diverted at the police stage (PCIJ, 2022). Theft and drug possession, followed by robbery and rape, are among the most common offenses among CICL in youth facilities awaiting transfer or court disposition (JJWC, 2020).

Effective CICL responses are important both from a human rights perspective and an effort to improve community safety. According to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, children should only be detained as a last resort option for the shortest possible time (UN, 1985). Additionally, criminal legal system contact itself is linked to subsequent offenses for youth rather than deterrence of future crime (PAP, 2016).

When a person encounters the criminal legal system, their overall well-being should be prioritized, and their rights protected. This research report aims to inform future policy implementation by increasing public knowledge about effective CICL-serving programs. In this way, duty-bearers can best support youth and their communities.

Program Overview

Bahay Tuluyan is a non-governmental, children’s rights organization in the Philippines. Founded in 1987, Bahay Tuluyan works to prevent and respond to abuse and violence against children and youth (BT, 2023a). It provides community-based services and Alternative Family Care (AFC) programming at three residential centers: Manila, Laguna, and Quezon.

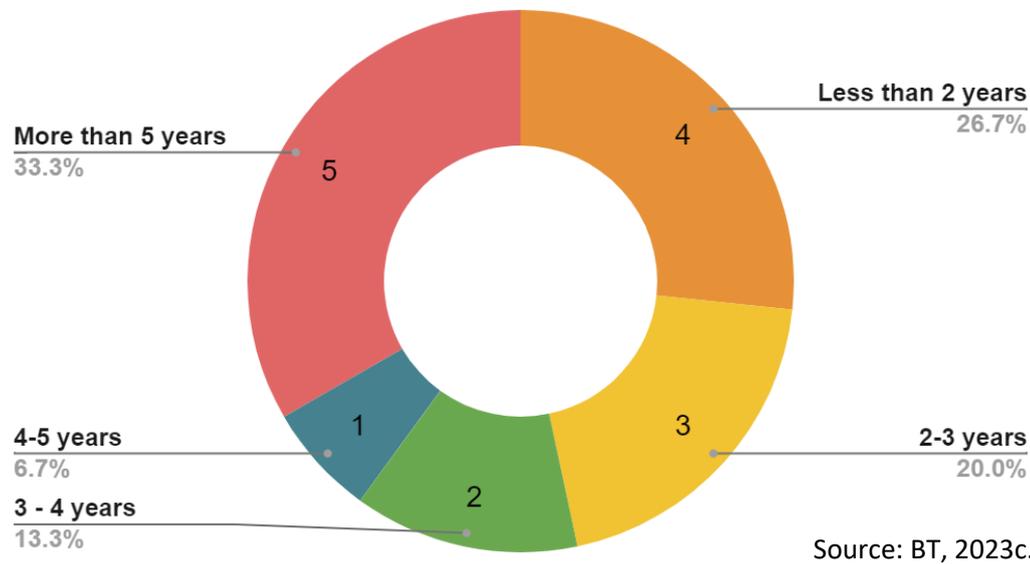
BTQ is an AFC center for boys in San Antonio, Quezon on Luzon. Since opening its doors in 2005, BTQ offers rights-based residential care for male youth (BT, 2023b). Their ages generally range from 10-22 years old (Field Notes, 2023). BTQ is accredited at the highest level by DSWD (level 3). BTQ began accepting CICL⁶ in 2011 since there was, and continues to be, no *Bahay Pag-asa* in the Province of Quezon (Staff Interviews, 2023). This decision not only responds to a community need but aligns with the organization’s goal to protect youth from violence and abuse. Since then, the program has maintained a blended population of CICL and Children at Risk (CAR) due to personal, familial, or social factors. Common life experiences among participants include exposure to trauma, violence, unstable home lives, exploitation, and poverty (Staff Interviews, 2023).



Population

BTQ had 34 total participants from January 2021 through December 2022 (BT, 2023c). As of January 2023, 26 youth were involved in BTQ either living at the center (“in shelter”) or receiving continued BTQ support after being

Figure 1. Length of stay, discharged BTQ participants (January 2021 - December 2022)



discharged to independent living in the community (“community-based program”). The average age of participants in shelter is 16.9 years old. Nearly 75 percent of participants are age 15 and older (BT, 2023c). Among young adults in the community-based program, the average age is 20.6 years old, which reflects the program’s goal to support discharged BTQ participants who lack family support in their transition to adulthood.

The most common referrals for program placement were made by government agencies (14) followed by NGO referrals (8). Other participants were referred by family or friends, walked in, or previously participated in Bahay Tuluyan’s Mobile Unit community outreach program. Most participants (47 percent) were from Manila, 35.5 percent were from Quezon Province, and the remaining 17.7 percent were from other provinces in the Philippines. All CICL

⁶ BTQ serves CICL participants with various offense types. Decisions about program fit are based on individualized case reviews rather than blanket requirements or restrictions (Staff Interviews, 2023).

participants are from Quezon through government referrals. CICL constituted 29.41 percent of all participants in the past 2 years. This expands to 38.24 percent when we include youth without formal CICL status but for whom law enforcement contact played a role in their BTQ placement (BT, 2023c).

Youth discharged from BTQ within the past two years were case managed by Bahay Tuluyan for an average of 4.52 years (Figure 1) (BT, 2023c). The maximum length of stay of a discharged BTQ participant during this time period was 11 years. One CAR participant expressed, *"Matagal na ako dito kailangan ko ng makasama ang aking pamilya ko"* (I have been here for a long time, and I need to be with my family) (Data Day, 2022).

Youths' varied lengths of stay reflect the ranging needs of the population served by BTQ. Notably, CICL discharged in the past two years experienced a shorter average stay of 2.71 years (BT, 2023c). CICL are placed at BTQ until disposition, facility transfer, case closure, or family reunification (Staff Interviews, 2023). In contrast, CAR come to BTQ for complex reasons such as abandonment, neglect, or dangerous living situations. These issues require BTQ staff to work with youth and their family members toward resolution and eventual reunification, or to prepare the youth to live independently (Field Notes, 2023).

I thought it would be like a prison where there are two police officers guarding and that I cannot run away... This place is different from that.

"Akala ko kase dito kulong. Kulong kase iyon, may dalawang pulis na nagbabantay. Talagang di ka makatakas... Ibang iba ito kesa doon."

- BTQ Participant

Physical Design

BTQ consists of two residential sites located in rural barangays near San Antonio, Quezon. The main site ("Center") sits on 1 hectare of land and includes 3 family-style homes, 2 small group homes structured for semi-independent living, a family-style kitchen, dining room, training center, office spaces, and a farming area with pigs and chickens (Field Notes, 2023). The second site ("Farm") is part of Bahay Tuluyan Nature Farms, which was established in 2015 (BT, 2023a). The nearly 4-hectare Farm includes a plot for growing organic rice, vegetables, and livestock. The Farm has one group home for participants, boys aged 15 and up, which is set up for semi-independent living. There is also an outdoor kitchen, covered patio, and live-in houseparent bedroom.

Both BTQ sites are staff-secure meaning that personnel are responsible for monitoring participants and responding to any safety or security issues. There are limited physical security features (e.g., no high fences, barbed wire, locked bars). These features align with best practices emphasizing youth facility designs that "reflect a home-like, non-penal environment" (AECF, 2014, p.159). This creates restorative conditions in which youth experience an environment that reflects a family and community setting rather than harsh institutional conditions.

From left to right: BTQ Center's education area, two group homes, and main building which has a dining room, kitchen, conference room, and offices.



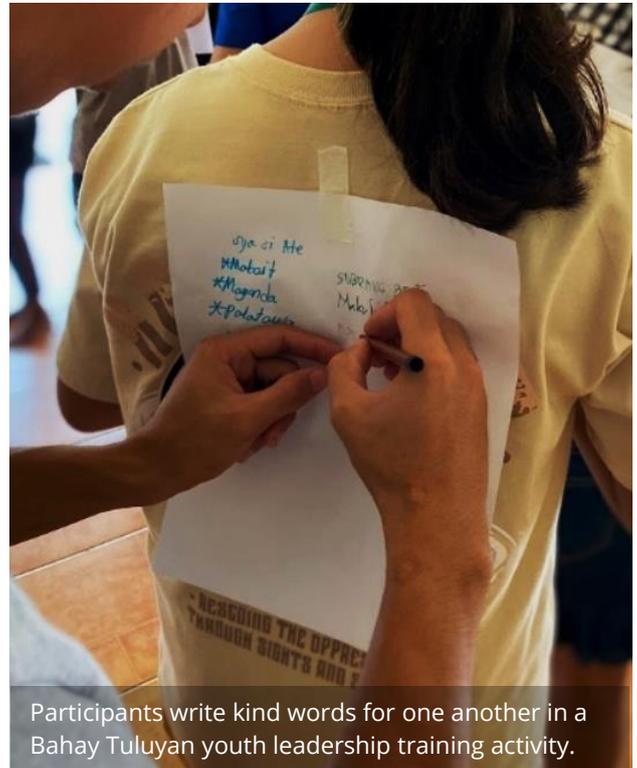
Program Outcomes

Resiliency

Resilience refers to a person’s capacity to overcome challenges and sustain wellness within their specific cultural context (Ungar, 2011). Through the social ecological perspective, resilience is not simply a personal trait but rather a person’s access to resources through their family and community.

Bahay Tuluyan measures changes in participants’ resilience over time through the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM). The CYRM is a validated research-based assessment⁷ used internationally to capture self-reported factors related to resilience (RRC, 2022). A Bahay Tuluyan social worker administers the assessment to each youth at the start of their participation, and every six months thereafter.

The CYRM measures resilience with questions clustered into eight sub-categories within three categories: individual, caregivers, and context. It consists of questions adapted for the specific social context, which measure a youth’s individual, relational, communal, and cultural resources that support their resilience (RRC, 2022).



Bahay Tuluyan youth respond to 36 statements by selecting their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert⁸ scale. Below, you will find samples from each CYRM category and subcategory:

Individual

- Personal Skills: I try to keep going when things get hard.
- Social Skills: I think it is important to help out in my community.
- Peer Support: People outside my family care about me when times are hard.

Caregivers

- Psychological Caregiving: I feel safe when I am with my family.
- Physical Caregiving: There is enough to eat when I am hungry.

Context

- Cultural: I know where my family comes from and my personal history.
- Education: I can access services that help me find pathways to a better life.
- Spiritual: My spiritual beliefs are a source of strength for me.

When I leave Bahay Tuluyan, I know that I learned a lot and I have a lot of things to contribute outside.

“Marami akong natutunan at marami na rin akong natulong sa Bahay tuluyan. Tapos kunwari marami akong natutunan.”

- BTQ Participant

On average, youth⁹ at BTQ between January 2021 and December 2022 showed an overall increase in their CYRM scores (6.83%) during their participation in the program (BT, 2023). The increase over time proved highly statistically significant¹⁰ ($p=0.01$) in a paired t-test. Average scores increased across all CYRM categories and subcategories between participants’ first and most-recent assessments. The highest increase of any CYRM subcategory, a 10.33 percent increase in psychological caregiving factors, was statistically significant ($p=0.2$). Table 1 on page 8 details CYRM outcomes among BTQ participants.

⁷ The CYRM was developed by the International Resilience Project (IRP) at the Resilience Research Centre (RRC).

⁸ The Likert scale is commonly used to provide a predictable question structure with ratings from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

⁹ BTQ participants with at least two CYRMs conducted in the past two years are included in the sample ($n=27$), which amounts to 79.41 percent of the population during that period. The first and most-recent assessments were analyzed for changes over time.

¹⁰ Statistical significance ($p<0.05$) indicates that it is unlikely for a relationship between data sets to be due to chance.

Resilience factors among CAR participants at BTQ (n=20) increased across all CYRM categories and subcategories (BT, 2023). Notably, CAR participants rated psychological caregiving factors an average of 14.29 percent higher on their most-recent assessment compared to their first assessment (p=0.02). The CAR participant population reported an 8.48 percent increase in personal skills and a 7.07 percent increase in cultural context, which were of high statistical significance (p=0.002 and p=0.01, respectively).

Table 1. CYRM results of BTQ participants (January 2021 - January 2023), disaggregated by CICL and CAR

CYRM Categories & Sub-categories	All Participants (n=27)		CAR Participants (n=20)		CICL Participants (n=7)	
	Percent Change	Significance (p-value)	Percent Change	Significance (p-value)	Percent Change	Significance (p-value)
Individual	5.72%	0.02	8.14%	0.00	-0.58%	0.41
Personal Skills	7.45%	0.01	8.48%	0.00	4.67%	0.09
Social Skills	5.84%	0.07	8.60%	0.08	-1.18%	0.35
Peer Support	2.60%	0.21	6.95%	0.02	-8.46%	0.04
Caregiver	9.52%	0.02	12.68%	0.01	1.61%	0.39
Psychological	10.33%	0.02	14.29%	0.02	0.54%	0.47
Physical	7.30%	0.10	8.33%	0.02	4.62%	0.22
Context	6.63%	0.02	7.40%	0.03	3.35%	0.13
Cultural	6.14%	0.07	7.07%	0.01	3.75%	0.07
Education	8.47%	0.02	9.33%	0.20	6.20%	0.04
Spiritual	4.99%	0.10	5.36%	0.28	4.00%	0.16
Total	6.83%	0.01	8.84%	0.02	1.65%	0.26

Source: BT, 2023.

CYRM results among CICL participants were less consistent than their peers. Most resiliency categories and subcategories did not prove statistically significant. This is likely due in part to the small sample size (n=7), which

increases the possibility of chance rather than a correlated relationship between the datasets. Additionally, CICL participants' scores in their first assessments were an average of 10.50 percent higher than CAR participants. Higher initial scores may contribute to decreases and fluctuations in subsequent assessments.

Two subcategories met the threshold for statistical significance among CICL participants. Peer support scores decreased an average of 8.46 percent (p=0.04) from the first assessment to the most-recent assessment. Meanwhile, CICL participants' average scores for educational context factors showed increased resiliency (6.20%, p=0.04) (BT, 2023).

Overall, participants averaged statistically significant increases in their reported personal skills (7.45%, p=0.01) and educational context (8.47%, p=0.02) (BT, 2023). Increases in resiliency relating to education and personal skills are a particularly relevant outcome given BTQ's emphasis on school participation, children's rights education, and development of independent living skills.

I am thankful for all the help that Bahay Tuluyan Quezon is doing for us. Most of the things we need are being given. I hope there will be more blessings to come and for them to continue helping and understanding kids like me.

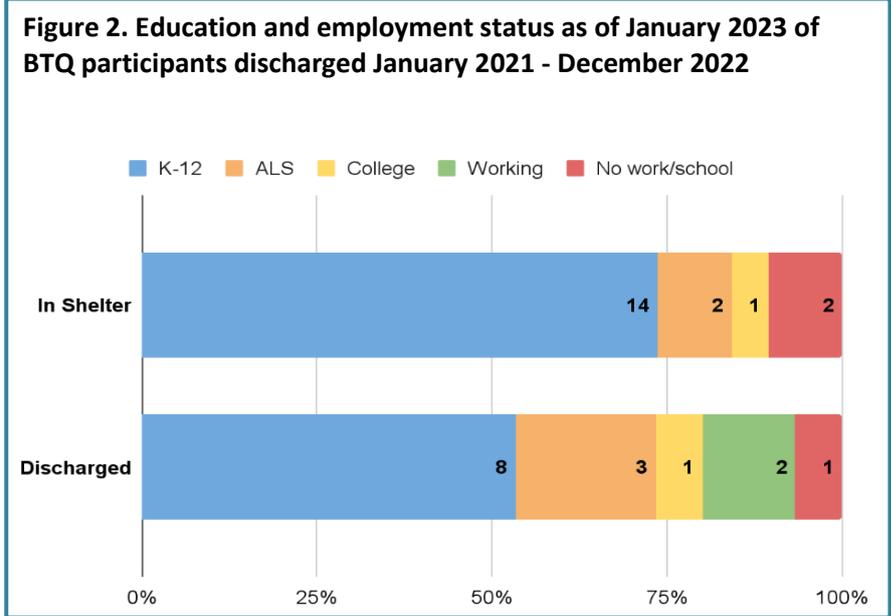
"Tsaka salamat sa mga binibigay na tulong ng Bahay Tuluyan Quezon. Halos lahat talaga ay naibigay. Sana more blessings to come lang. Tsaka sana walang sawang pagtulong at pagintindi sa mga bata na kagaya kong nandito."

- BTQ Participant

Reentry

Reentry outcomes are a key sign of residential programs’ effectiveness. Among all BTQ participants from January 2021 through December 2022, 64.71 percent were working toward family reunification as their primary case management¹¹ goal (BT, 2023c). The other 32.35 percent were preparing to live independently.

Out of the 15 participants discharged from BTQ in the past two years, 6 lived with their family, 1 lived independently, and 1 moved to an NGO for special support as of January 2023 (BT, 2023c). Another 7 youth (46.66 percent) transitioned out of shelter into the community-based program. Community-based youth live on their own outside of BTQ and receive supplemental resources from Bahay Tuluyan including work opportunities and/or funds for rent, groceries, and school supplies (Staff Interviews, 2023). Financial and social safety nets can help transition-aged youth reach their goals and establish a strong foundation¹² for adulthood.



Source: BT, 2023c.

Educational involvement is high among youth in reentry over the past two years, with 80 percent (12 youth) participating in educational programs as of January 2023 (BT, 2023c) (Figure 2). These positive outcomes are particularly important given that CICL often face stigma and a lack of education and employment opportunities in reentry (Austen, 2012).

Youth Perspectives

This research aims not only to examine outcomes among BTQ participants, but to better understand their daily experiences. In November 2022, 17 BTQ participants engaged in peer-led qualitative and quantitative data collection activities (See Research Methods on page 3 for more information). With participation from 89.5 percent of youth in shelter at BTQ (17 out of 19), the data provides a strong sample of the population (Data Day, 2022).



Data Day participants share their life goals and priorities while presenting their group’s collage.

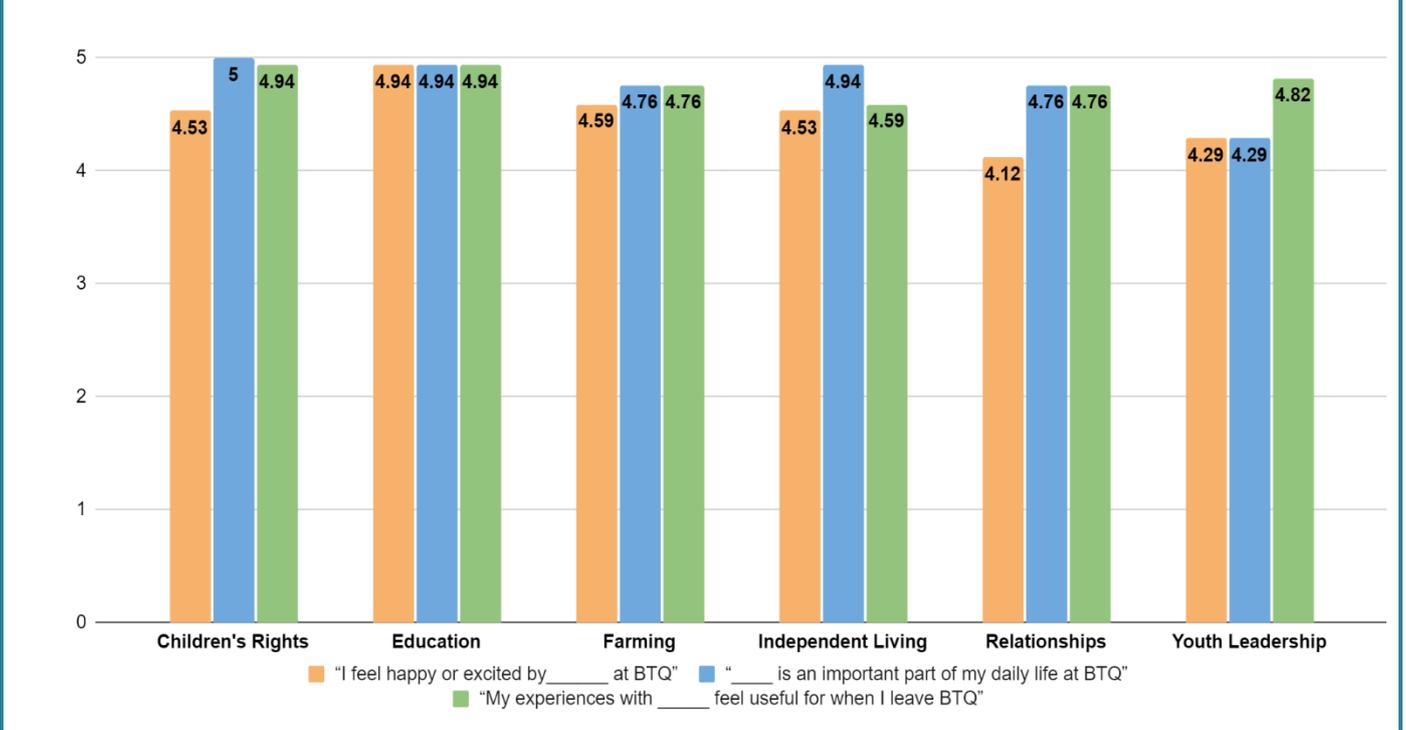
Youth researchers defined six key program areas at BTQ, which will be explored in this section: education, relationships, youth leadership, children’s rights, independent living, and farming. When asked about their experiences at BTQ in these areas, participants consistently rated¹³ their experiences with high satisfaction (Data Day, 2022). There were slight variations in responses disaggregated by age (children under 15 versus youth 15 and older) averaging a difference of 1.56% between the age groups’ responses. Both age groups’ average ratings were at least 4 out of 5 for all program areas (Figure 3).

¹¹ At Bahay Tuluyan, social workers provide case management for all youth in residential placements.

¹² For more information, visit “Stabilizing Children’s Lives—A Web of Stabilizing Supports.” At: [://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/kids-context/projects/stabilizing-childrens-livesweb-stabilizing-supports](http://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/kids-context/projects/stabilizing-childrens-livesweb-stabilizing-supports).

¹³ The data collection activity used a Likert scale: 5 - great (*magaling*), 4 - pretty good (*medyo*), 3 - okay (*okay lang*), 2 - not good (*hindi maganda*), 1 - bad (*masama*).

Figure 3. BTQ participant satisfaction in key program areas, average ratings on 1-5 scale (n=17), November 2022



Source: Data Day, 2022.

Education

BTQ participants attend school in the local community. This integration offers youth an opportunity to cultivate peer relationships, participate in extracurricular activities, and promote a sense of belonging in the community. Otherwise, disconnection from social supports can negatively impact community reintegration following a person's placement in an institution (Mears & Travis, 2004). As of January 2023, 73.68 percent of participants in shelter were



I need help in my studies so that I could learn a lot of things!
"Kailangan ko tulong sa pag-aaral para marami akong matutuna!"
 - BTQ Participant

Younger participants on their daily 10-minute walk to the elementary school.

enrolled in K-12 education (BT, 2023c). Among the remaining youth, 1 was enrolled in college, 2 in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), and 2 were not involved in education.

A BTQ social worker enrolls students in the appropriate grade and program, prioritizing K-12 education and substituting with the ALS when necessary (Staff Interviews, 2023). Additionally, the social worker maintains working relationships with school administration to address barriers to enrollment (e.g., no birth certificate) or problems that arise in school. Bahay Tuluyan's strong inter-agency coordination with duty-bearers and stakeholders reflects best practices for JJWA implementation (JJWC, 2019).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, BTQ staff supported youth with remote module learning (Staff Interviews, 2023). However, this proved challenging given limited staff capacity, as well as a wide range of learning levels and needs. In the fall of 2022, the Philippines' Department of Education established a return to in-person classes (DepEd, 2022). Since then, staff and volunteers assist youth with assignments when requested (Field Notes, 2023). BTQ provides school materials and uniforms. In some cases, current and former participants attending college receive tuition support from Bahay Tuluyan (Staff Interviews, 2023).

When asked whether they feel *masaya* (happy or excited in English) by their education at BTQ, 94.12 percent (16) of respondents selected the highest possible rating of 5 (Data Day, 2022). Additionally, participants described a time they needed help from BTQ: 53.33 percent of responses (8) referenced studies and job opportunities, of which, half (4) also expressed a need for financial assistance (Data Day, 2022).

Outside of formal education, 60 percent (6) of responses referenced *learning new things* when asked to share a time they felt happy at BTQ (Data Day, 2022). These include both tangible skills and soft skills. For example, one youth explained that he learned time management while attending school and completing chores at BTQ. He shared, “Sometimes, I study first before playing,” and went on to say that he felt, “happy because I was able to do all the things I needed to do” (*Minsan una mong ginagawa bago ang laro. Masaya kase nagawa na lahat ng kailangan gawin*) (Data Day, 2022). Additionally, when participants were asked to describe a time when they learned something new, 59 percent (13) of responses included *good manners* such as listening to staff, being friendly, working hard, and respecting other people (Data Day, 2022).

I need financial assistance to pay my tuition fee if I am in college and also to find a job.
“Sa pag-aaral tsaka paghahanap buhay kung paano humanap. Iyong bayad sa tuiton fee pagdating ng college.”
 - BTQ Participant

Relationships

Strong interpersonal relationships are important for youths’ well-being, social development, and safety. Relationships at BTQ are described positively by participants. When asked whether they feel happy or excited about their relationships in the program, respondents averaged a rating of 4.12 on a 5-point scale (Data Day, 2022). Additionally, 9 out of 10 youth responses referenced *relationships* as a reason they felt happy at BTQ (Data Day, 2022). Participants expressed that they enjoy meeting new people, making friends, and feeling a family connection with staff and peers (Data Day, 2022).

At Bahay Tuluyan, a participant’s relationships with peers, family, and staff are promoted in organizational culture and programming (Field Notes, 2023). For example, Family Day is a monthly gathering at each program site during which youth play games, share a large meal, celebrate everyone with milestones¹⁴ that month, and receive awards for achievements such as maintaining the cleanest house. Additionally, Welcome and Farewell rituals honor the transitions of every participant, staff, and volunteer (Field Notes,



BTQ participant receives a candle and birthday wishes from a guest, one of many debut traditions at a party in his honor.

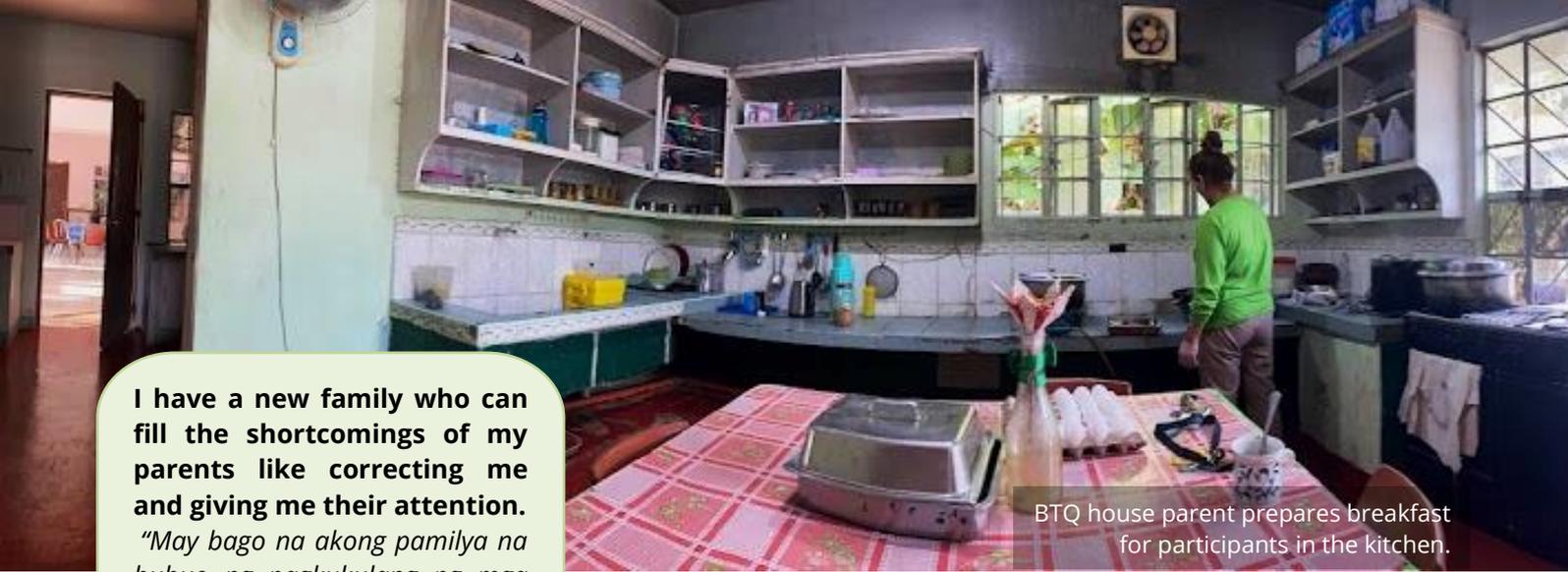
There was cake and gifts. I felt embarrassed because others were giving their messages. I am not used to it because we never had that in our house.
“Nagpa cake pa may regalo. Nahihiya [ako] kase nagmemessage iyong iba. Hindi po kase sanay, kase sa bahay namin walang ganoon.”
 - BTQ Participant

2023). A favorite among BTQ youth is the annual Christmas party, which brings together youth across all programs complete with food, games, and gifts (Data Day, 2022). These gatherings allow participants to connect in a fun, relaxed setting.

Friendships and peer relationships make up a significant part of BTQ youths’ experiences. On a usual day, youth can be observed farming together, participating in staff-led

activities, completing chores, lounging, playing basketball, enjoying unstructured play (Field Notes, 2023). One participant expressed that harmonious relationships are important since they live together, but it can be challenging as well. He explained that because “we grew up in different cultures,” it can be “a little bit hard for me to get along with others” (*Magkakaiba ng ugaling kinalakihan kaya medyo nahihirapan akong makisama para sa akin*) (Data Day, 2022).

¹⁴ Milestones include birthdays, graduations, program arrival, and program departure. During these celebrations, the honored person or people sit at the front of the room with a personalized backdrop while others verbally share well wishes.



BTQ house parent prepares breakfast for participants in the kitchen.

I have a new family who can fill the shortcomings of my parents like correcting me and giving me their attention.
"May bago na akong pamilya na bubuo ng pagkukulang ng mga magulang mo, pagpuna nila para sayo at sa atensyon mo."
 - BTQ Participant

Relationships with staff strongly affect youths' daily lives. Most participants (76.47 percent strongly agreed) that relationships are an important part of their daily life at BTQ (Data Day, 2022). As of January 2023, the team includes a site manager, social worker, program manager, support staff, live-in volunteers, and house parents. Each house parent live on-site five

days per week during which they are responsible for cooking meals, supervising chore responsibilities, ensuring youth safety, and maintaining clean living conditions (Field Notes, 2023). The staffing structure contributes to a home-like environment for youth.

When BTQ participants were asked to share a time when they felt *malungkot* (sad or lonely in English), 71.43 percent (5) of respondents expressed sadness about being away from their family (Data Day, 2022). BTQ social workers coordinate home visits¹⁵ two times a year on average for youth whose safety and well-being are not at risk within their family (Staff Interviews, 2023). Home visits help youth explore the possibility of, and prepare for, reunification with their families.

While BTQ exhibits strong coordination with families and government agencies to provide home visits, the program lacks consistency in supporting youths' regular contact with family (Field Notes, 2023) (See Recommendations on page 16). Participants without personal devices¹⁶ require a social worker to schedule a weekly 15-minute call with their families in coordination with on-site staff (Field Notes, 2023). Barriers include limited staff capacity, impromptu scheduling, and inconsistent wifi/device access among families (Field Notes, 2023). Some youth show disappointment or frustration when they experience prolonged periods with no family contact (Field Notes, 2023). One youth expressed, "I feel lonely because I cannot call my parents" (*Nalulungkot ako dahil hindi ko matawagan ang aking mga magulang*) (Data Day, 2022).

The importance of relationships extends beyond youths' time at BTQ. When youth were asked to create collages about their life goals after BTQ, every group¹⁷ presentation included plans for *family* (Data Day, 2022). All groups also discussed careers, commonly: police officers, soldiers, seamen, and jobs in the service industry. Three out of four groups included *saving money and travel* (Data Day, 2022).

I feel happy because I will visit my family. I will see them again and spend time with them.
"Masaya [ako] kase bibisita ako sa aking pamilya. Makikita ko na sila muli at makakasama."
 - BTQ Participant



BTQ participants play basketball with a volunteer at the on-site court.

¹⁵ Youth have an opportunity to visit their family during school breaks in summer and winter. CICL participants are eligible for home visits only with judicial permission (Staff Interviews, 2023).
¹⁶ As of January 2023, 5 BTQ participants had a personal cell phone/tablet. Daily use is allowed 5pm - 8pm (Field Notes, 2023).
¹⁷ BTQ participants were divided into groups based on age, resulting in four groups each with three youth (Data Day, 2022).

Children’s Rights & Youth Leadership

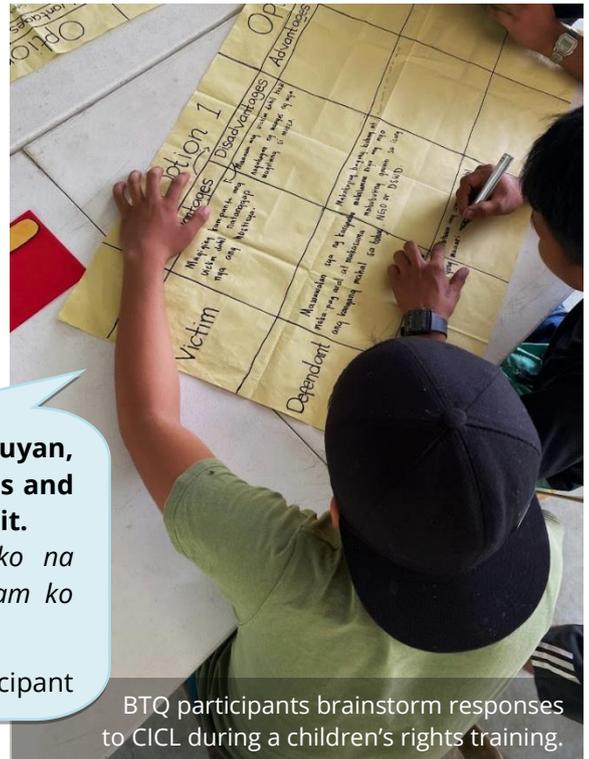
Central to its mission, Bahay Tuluyan promotes the protection of children’s rights¹⁸ in all its programs. Youth at BTQ participate in age-tailored training sessions about children’s rights based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Field Notes, 2023; UN, 1989). Trainings at BTQ are facilitated every other weekend on a planned topic, such as the right to basic standards of living, civil and political rights, protection from abuse and exploitation, and special protections for children involved in labor, drug use, armed conflict, or the criminal legal system (BT, 2011).

In 2022, the BTQ program manager who facilitated children’s rights education was a former participant at the center. This approach aligns with *credible messengers*¹⁹ programs, which support participants by engaging mentors with similar life experiences. As of January 2023, 26 percent of Bahay Tuluyan staff formerly participated in its programs (Staff Interviews, 2023).

When I leave Bahay Tuluyan, I am aware of my rights and I know how to fight for it.

“Pagumalis ako, alam ko na ang aking karapatan. Alam ko na paano ipaglaban.”

- BTQ Participant



BTQ participants brainstorm responses to CICAL during a children’s rights training.

Young people themselves play a critical role in children’s rights programming at Bahay Tuluyan. The Children’s Council is a youth leadership body made up of participants across all programs. Each year, participants cast their votes for peers at their program site. BTQ’s seven elected Council members participate in leadership training, lead children’s meetings every other week, and often volunteer for additional responsibilities such as facilitating activities (Field Notes, 2023). BTQ programming promotes leadership development and effectively engages youth in organizational decision-making.

In 2021, Bahay Tuluyan established a Child Protection Policy (CPP), which outlines appropriate behaviors to prevent and protect youth from abuses. The CPP established protocols to investigate and respond effectively to any concerns. Youth display knowledge²⁰ of the CPP standards and comfort expressing concerns, observations, and experiences with a social worker (Field Notes, 2023). Additionally, participants were expressly asked for feedback during biannual staff performance reviews through private online surveys (Field Notes, 2023). Open, trusting relationships in which youth feel empowered to advocate for themselves and others aligns with the organization’s children’s rights framework.



Children’s Council members from all Bahay Tuluyan sites partake in a leadership training activity.

Children’s rights ranked highest among key program areas in importance to youths’ daily lives at BTQ, with all (17) respondents rating its importance as 5 on a 5-point scale (Data Day, 2022). When asked whether children’s rights would be helpful when they leave BTQ, 94.94 percent of youth indicated 5 out of 5 points, tied with education for highest ranking (Data Day, 2022). Bahay Tuluyan’s identity as a children’s rights organization informs its’ approach to residential care and programming.

¹⁸ In 2019, Bahay Tuluyan started a social enterprise called The Children’s Rights Institute, which expanded training and professional development opportunities for stakeholders outside of the organization (Staff Interviews, 2023).

¹⁹ Programs using *credible messengers* practices show promising results. See Urban Institute (2022), page 7, for examples: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/new-york-citys-wounded-healers-cross-program-participatory-action-research>.

²⁰ BTQ participants are briefed about the CPP upon arrival, including appropriate and inappropriate conduct, and what to do if they have concerns.

Independent Living

Bahay Tuluyan's Independent Living Skills Program helps youth develop abilities such as cooking, budgeting, saving, and maintaining personal integrity. BTQ participants live in houses on-site that are either supported by a live-in house parent or set up for semi-independent living (Field Notes, 2023). The house parent stays in a separate bedroom on the first floor, while the children sleep in a shared room on the second floor. Youth generally begin their stay at BTQ in a house parent-supported home and later move into one of the group homes that promote independent living skills. The group homes consist of 3 to 6 youth and no house parent, so youth are responsible for cooking meals on a wood-burning stove and cleaning their living space (Field Notes, 2023). Additionally, participants in reentry who are working toward independent living can receive support from BTQ while living in the nearby community (See Program Outcomes on page 7 for details).

On average, participants rated the usefulness of independent living skills as 4.5 on a 5-point scale, indicating their satisfaction (Data Day, 2022). While useful for all youth, independent living skills are particularly important for the one-third of participants whose case management goal is independent living rather than family reunification (BT, 2023c). When BTQ participants were asked to share a time when they learned something new, 36.36 percent of responses (8) referenced *independent living skills*, such as cooking meals, washing clothes, and cooperating with other people (Data Day, 2022). Additionally, 27.27 percent (6) mentioned job skills such as electrical work, grass-cutting, and painting.

One youth in a group home setting explained, "We are learning how to budget our money, be independent, cook, and the need to work. They are not letting us work literally but in the future we can say that the experiences we had in our youth helped us a lot" (*Natututo kaming mag budget ng pera, maging independent, magluto, iyong tipong kailangan namin magtrabaho. Hindi naman kami pinagtrabaho, pero in the future kung baga masasabi namin malaking tulong iyong nangyari noong kabataan namin*) (Data Day, 2022). This is reflected in BTQ participants' high ratings of the importance of independent living skills. Sixteen respondents (94.12 percent) selected 5 on a 5-point scale when asked if independent living is an important part of their daily life at BTQ, indicating strong agreement (Data Day, 2022).



Outdoor laundry area where youth and house parents wash and dry clothing.

When I first arrived here, I did not know how to wash clothes but now, I know how to do it.

"Noong una hindi pa ako marunong maglaba, ngayon marunong na."

- BTQ Participant

BTQ participant uses a grass cutting tool while wearing protective clothing.



Farming

BTQ operates organic farms as a means for skill development among participants as well as a social enterprise to generate sustainable funding for the organization. Participants engage in daily farming tasks: feeding pigs and chickens, harvesting pigs and chickens, planting their specialty purple rice, tending to the rice, harvesting rice, milling rice, and gardening vegetables (Field Notes, 2023). This is particularly relevant to CICL participants given the JJWA's

I came here without any knowledge about farming, planting rice, rice milling and harvesting. However, when I came here, I started learning those things.

"Pumunta ako dito, wala akong kaalamalam tungkol sa pagpapalay, pagtatanim, pag-aani. Pero dahil noong ako ay napunta dito, natutunan ko lahat ng iyon."

- BTQ Participant

inclusion of agricultural camps as an alternative placement for youth convicted of a crime (RA 9344, Sect 51).

Participants track the time they spend on tasks and receive pay for their contributions, half of which goes into a savings account for the participant that is set up and maintained by Bahay Tuluyan during their stay (Staff Interviews, 2023).

When asked whether they feel happy or excited (*masaya*) about farming at BTQ, 16 out of 17 (94.12%) respondents chose 4 or higher, and 70.59 percent chose 5, on a 5-point scale indicating satisfaction (Data Day, 2022). Sixteen out of 17 respondents agreed that farming is an important part of their daily life at BTQ while 15 respondents agreed that their experiences in farming would be useful when they leave BTQ

(Data Day, 2022).

The usefulness of farming after leaving BTQ varies by geographic areas to which participants will return. For example, one youth from Manila stated, "I don't know if I can use farming [when I leave Bahay Tuluyan]" (*Hindi ko alam kung magagamit ko ang farming samin [kelan umalis ako]*) (Data Day, 2022). In contrast, one of his peers from a rural area expressed, "You must know how to farm. It is not enough if you are only good at one thing" (*Importante na alam mo iyong farming. Hindi pwedeng nagfococus ka lang sa isang bagay*).

When participants were asked to share a time when they learned something new, 81.82 percent (18) of responses referenced *farming*, making it the most significant theme for this question (Data Day, 2022). Additionally, *gardening* was noted specifically in 44.44 percent (8) of the responses that included farming as a time when they learned something new. Farming can support youths' employable skills, mental health, personal development, and social connections.



From left to right: BTQ participants and a house parent prepare dried rice for cooking, which was grown on-site; youth feed pigs a midday snack (*meryenda*) at the Farm; two participants and a volunteer water the plants in the vegetable garden.

Recommendations

Bahay Tuluyan Quezon

Improve regular communication with families: The program can address concerns regarding inconsistent contact between youth and their families by strengthening internal protocols for family contact. BTQ should schedule calls in advance, adjusting as needed, including weekday evenings as an option rather than relying on weekends when most programming takes place. Staff responsibilities (e.g., providing device access) should be clarified for coordinating calls. Improved contact with families would be highly beneficial to youth in preparation for family reunification, which is the case management goal for most program participants.

Implement plans to shorten length of stay: Family separation, no matter how well-managed, has known negative impacts on children’s well-being (Waddoups et. al., 2019). Since BTQ is a last resort option for youth who cannot safely live in their homes, placements should be reassessed by the social work team every 6 months. This will ensure the child is only in alternative care for as long as necessary and upholds children’s right to “have their situation reviewed by their local authorities regularly” (UNCRC, 1989).

Prior to notifying the participant of a discharge date, their assigned social worker should establish a clear timeline with all necessary parties and ensure its feasibility. Managing youths’ expectations can support their preparation and mitigate some emotional challenges of the transition. This recommendation aligns with program goals discussed by Bahay Tuluyan’s social work team in October 2022 (Field Notes, 2023).

I am happy because I learned a lot of things, met a lot of people, visited a lot of places and helped a lot of people.

“Masaya naman po dahil marami kaming natutunan, maraming nakilala, maraming napuntahan at maraming natulungan na ibang tao.”

- BTQ Participant

Policy Implementation

Address youths’ root needs: Programs like BTQ, which integrate CICL with CAR, can benefit youth by addressing their underlying needs. BTQ participants have many similar life experiences outside of their contact with the law. Needs include physical safety, mental health, social skills, a sense of belonging, and work skills for future opportunities (Staff Interviews, 2023). While case-specific consideration is needed when accepting CICL, BTQ demonstrates that programs can meet the varied needs of participants.

Utilize NGOs to address community needs: Government agencies, particularly those involved in responding to CICL, should strengthen relationships with local NGOs for the management of residential programs and community-based placements. NGOs within impacted communities can leverage their credibility and social network to increase responsiveness to the needs of youth and their families.

Conclusion

BTQ offers a strong model for residential care serving CICL and CAR. Participants show measurable resiliency improvements and promising outcomes during reentry. This study takes a deep dive into the daily lives of vulnerable

youth living at BTQ. Observations over a 9-month period, as well as participants’ own input, build a robust basis for evaluation.

Children’s rights and participation are interwoven into Bahay Tuluyan programs. From supportive relationships to independent living skills, and education access to agricultural training, BTQ provides a home-like experience for youth in their care. Organizations and agencies providing similar services can benefit from reflecting on BTQ’s approach and prioritizing program areas that are most valued by youth.

When I grow up, I want to build a Bahay Tuluyan... so these kids would be able to learn... I want to help other people.

“Tapos magtatayo ako ng bahay tuluyan. [Bakit?] para matuto rin sila... tsaka makatulong sa ibang tao.”

- BTQ Participant



After a successful rice harvest, a BTQ participant prepares the field for the next planting.

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