



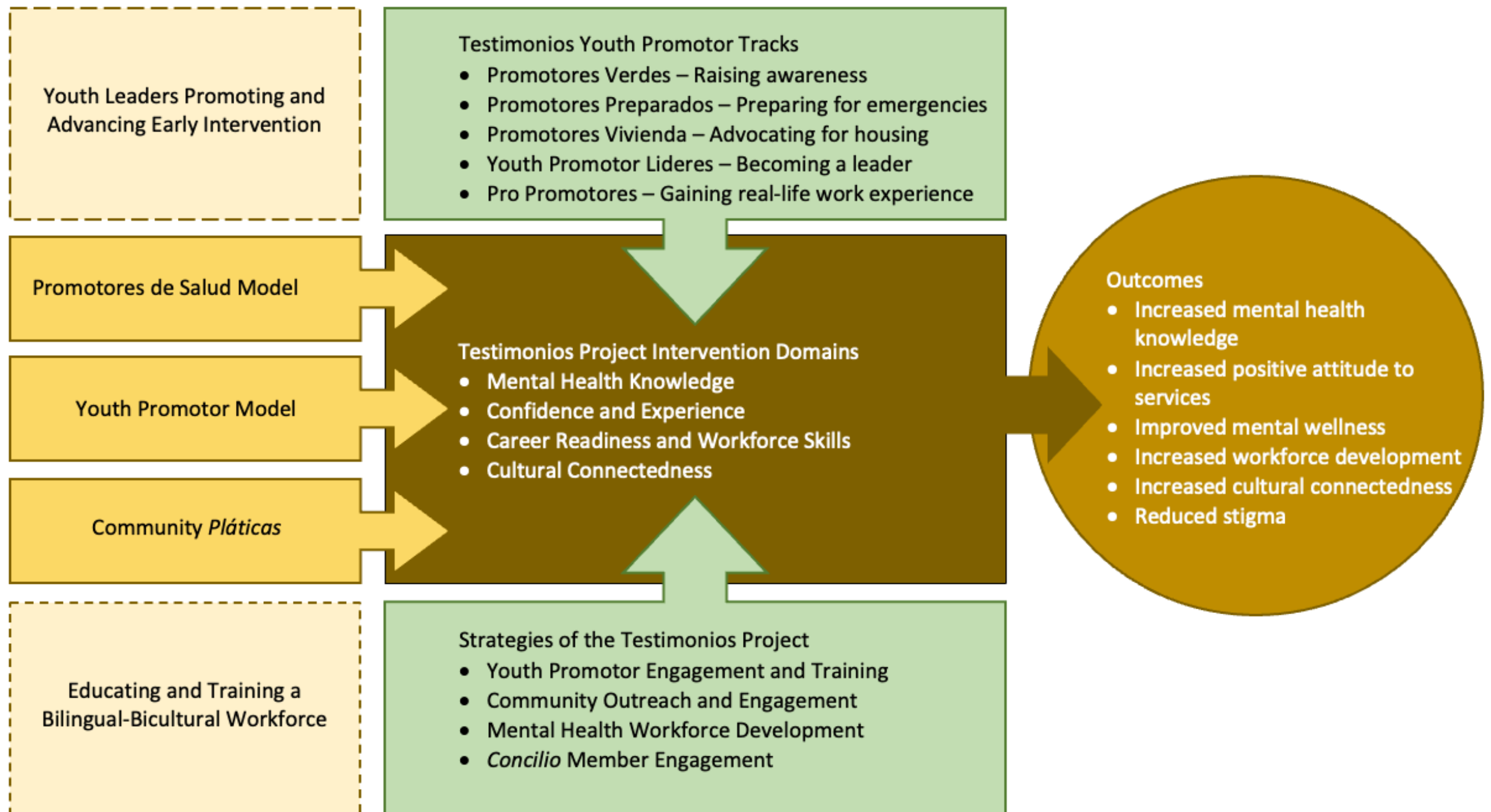
The **Testimonios Project**, an out-of-school time mental health stigma reduction and prevention program for bilingual and bicultural Latinx Youth Promotores is rooted in THE Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. This framework illustrates that youth must be engaged, supported, and mentored to recognize the many risks and positive assets/strengths linked to their mental well-being. This project also uses the Promotores de Salud and Community *Pláticas* approaches to strengthen the Latino Service Providers (LSPs) Youth Promotor Model (Figure 1). In the strategies component, youth are expected to complete a 12-month and 124 hours of training. Through experiential learning activities, youth reach out to Latinx communities providing resources and information about mental wellness. Motivating youth and preparing them for college and careers in the mental health field is another important element. It is in this component that youth choose and advance in the Testimonios Project Youth Promotor track —verdes, preparados, vivienda, lideres, and pro—and mentored by a *Concilio* member (i.e., Latinx leader in the mental health field).

Increasing youths' knowledge and skills, real-life experience, and confidence is a crucial foundation to successfully increasing youth promotores' college and career readiness. Cultural connectedness or feeling connected to spiritual and religious traditions, enhances youths' sense of cultural belonging and cultural strengths that become protective factors associated with overcoming stigma and improved psychological well-being.

The “Glows and grows” or informal conversations (*pláticas*) technique was used to collect qualitative data in real-time that included feedback loop sessions to gather information and improve the Testimonios Project. This approach is aligned with the Community-Based Participatory Research methodology to ensure that work is done alongside communities.

THE TESTIMONIOS PROJECT MODEL

FIGURE. 1 The LSP Testimonios Project Model



LSP's core values are: **Equity & Inclusion** — All have the right to belong; **Community Voice & Power** — Community voice equals power; **Partnerships & Education** — Partnerships combined with innovative thinking strengthens the future; and **Interdependence & Intergenerational** — Culture and values connect people across generations.

KEY FINDINGS

QUALITATIVE

In general, youth participants reported experiencing strong connections with LSP staff (97%), increase in their confidence (97%) in addressing potential risks to their well-being. A total of 90% of youth interviewed indicated a strong willingness to help others in need of care and 80% would also seek services for themselves when needed. Another interesting theme was youth's openness to engage in conversations with peers about mental health (75%). When considered on the basis of reducing stigma, these findings may have strengthened youths commitment to the application of learned skills in the Testimonios Project. One youth said:

"I remember specifically the suicide prevention training... how people are always scared to have that conversation... I learned that there are certain

barriers... but crossing those barriers might make the difference. Initially I felt scared to ask someone who was going through something... this program [Testimonios] it really made it clearer about how and when to ask." — Youth Promotora, 19 years old

"... I understand that it's okay to not be okay... It's okay if you need to cry or... when you want to give up. [In the Testimonios Project] I gained confidence to talk about myself [tell my story] and how I might not be okay." — Youth Promotora, 16 years old

Another youth reported that because of her participation in the Testimonios Project, she has *"changed how I speak to people... I've been able to help them... take the steps to feel better. I learned to listen... and let them share their feelings [and their story]"* — Youth Promotora, 16 years old

The theme, cultural connectedness was particularly relevant to youth recognizing language as a connector, *"...with this project [Testimonios], I felt really empowered speaking Spanish because I can [use it to] help people. I understand them. I understand their needs [their life experiences] and I'm able to [relate and] communicate with them better."* — Youth Promotora, 21 years old

KEY FINDINGS

QUANTITATIVE

98%

OF YOUTH PROMOTORES REPORTED FEELING MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. IT SEEMS THAT INCREASING YOUTHS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW TO ACCESS AND USE TREATMENT WHILE ALSO EMPOWERING THEM TRANSLATES TO REDUCING BARRIERS TO CARE.

98%

OF YOUTH PROMOTORES REPORTED FEELING CONFIDENT WITH THE EXPERIENCE APPLYING LEARNED STRATEGIES TO HANDLE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND HELP OTHERS FROM DIVERSE CULTURES AND BACKGROUNDS. THIS HIGHLIGHTS THE CAREER READINESS AS CENTRAL TO TESTIMONIOS.

86%

OF YOUTH PROMOTORES REPORTED FEELING MORE CONNECTED TO THEIR CULTURE AND/OR FEELING LESS ISOLATED FROM SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LIFE DURING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE TESTIMONIOS PROJECT. THIS FINDING HIGHLIGHTS TO ROLE OF CULTURE AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR.

79%

OF YOUTH PROMOTORES REPORTED FEELING MORE CAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS RELATED TO DEPRESSION. THIS FINDING EMPHASIZES EARLY DETECTION AND INTERVENTION AS AN ESSENTIAL STRATEGY TO CHANGING LIFE TRAJECTORIES FROM ILLNESS TO WELLNESS.

ALL YOUTH PARTICIPANTS CREDIT THE TESTIMONIOS PROJECT AS THE REASON FOR LEARNING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS NEEDED TO PROSPER IN THE MENTAL HEALTH WORKPLACE. FOR EXAMPLE, 82% SAID THEY LEARNED ABOUT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND 67% CITED PUBLIC SPEAKING AND DELIVERING A PRESENTATION. THIS MEANS THAT YOUTH ACQUIRED WORK READINESS BEHAVIORS THAT WILL HELP THEM BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ENGAGE PEOPLE IN CONVERSATION. AS INDICATED EARLIER, USING A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK ALLOWS YOUTH TO EMBRACE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND CULTURE.