



THE EARTHLODGE CENTER FOR TRANSFORMATION

2023 Annual Report

Striving and Thriving: Transforming Wellness
Into Well-Being Through Healing Justice
Practice and Advocacy in Our Community



Drum Wellness Circle, November 2023

www.earthlodgecenter.org

All photos credited to the Earthlodge Center

A word from our Founder, Queen Hollins

I always trust what I wake up with before I open my eyes, because there's no influence from anywhere but the Dream Time. In my dream, I envisioned us as a Phoenix, rising from the ashes, an alchemy that freed us to go into another dimension. Those ashes turned into compost to fertilize our new visions and allow us to remember how to heal ourselves by going back to nature. We survivors have a responsibility to take things to the next level, to plant new seeds, to reemerge from what no longer serves us. Reimagining how we can live freely with each other.

2023 was a year of "Striving and Thriving" at the Earthlodge. When the pandemic hit in 2020, we isolated ourselves at home and away from one another. In 2021 and 2022 we focused on resourcing our communities: sending bags of neem tea and cooking rice and beans for folks in the community because that's a powerhouse when it comes to fighting illness. We transformed how we connected to take care of each other. **We grieved together, dreamt together, shared knowledge with each other, and emerged stronger because we came together during the time we needed to most.**

2023 allowed us to gather on the land in-person more, to experiment with what the last three years had taught us, and re-familiarize ourselves with the new "normal." One that includes holistic healing and justice for all people. We've lived through uncharted territory and suffer in many ways because we still hold some heavy and painful memories. But we are living, and at the Earthlodge, we'll continue to step into a place where we've never been before. We'll become self-sufficient, healed, and continue striving and thriving.

Come join us.



We celebrate a year of Striving and Thriving.

While 2022 was a year of reemergence at the Earthlodge, 2023 was a year of Striving and Thriving as we hit the ground running at the beginning of the year and had very little time for looking back.

The first noteworthy expansion was the codification of the Gatekeepers program with its first official convening that brought a dozen community members together all dedicated to education, community building, and hands-on service. Gatekeepers have taken on activating Drum Medicine, building an active drum core of 8 drummers; QTBIPOC Sangha, running consistently with both online and in person meetings; Hands on the Land, allowing the community garden to flourish and the land to look beautiful and inviting; and Seasonal Ceremony along with Queen, anchoring our foundational wellness practices. The Earthlodge served 3,500 people across 100 programs in 2023.



Datura in the Earthlodge Garden, August 2023

There was wonderful expansion on the land as we learned about and practiced “sponge landscaping,” a soil conservation modality aimed at increasing the resilience level of soil and earth in urban communities, and laid down an irrigation drip system. We also brought on a full time groundskeeper towards the end of the year.

Programs expanded with regular offerings of Sound Baths and Limpia cleansings and an increase in requests to offer our wellness work at schools, wellness fairs, conferences, and Holiday events. Our Earthlodge Kids Program is growing young leaders who attend events as drummers and teach other youth how to play. Our drummers attended Born to Drum, an annual drumming festival, and Black Lesbians United (BLU) Annual Retreat.

Our community partnerships remain strong and continue to grow as we expand our footprint in the community and beyond. 2023 saw the Earthlodge called in by the City of Long Beach as a “First Responder Agency” bringing our wellness work into the community as support in times of trauma.

Our Programs

- Drum Wellness Circle
- QTBIPOC-centered Sangha meditation gatherings
- Seasonal Ceremony
- Gatekeeper Health Promoter Leader Program
- Well at Work - Work Shouldn't Hurt Project
- Hands on the Land
- Youth and Young Adult Rites of Passage
- Healing Into the Holidays
- Mental Health Limpia
- Sound Healing Meditation

In our **Drum Wellness Circle**, drum rhythms balance the mind, heart and soul and increase wellness and happiness for the whole community. Our Drum Wellness Circle provides an easy and accessible way to learn how to drum in community and with rhythm and flow. Even first-time drummers can access the healing that comes from the drum! As we reemerge from the global pandemic, our healing drum work has grown its capacity. We've strengthened relationships with our partners at the Homeland Cultural Center and were invited to drum in community at cultural and youth events.

Our **QTBIPOC-centered Sangha meditation gatherings** were held twice a month online and in-person. We enjoyed celebrating love in February by reading bell hooks and Black History Month where 25 people gathered for Touching the Earth in honor of our Black and Queer ancestors, wisdom keepers, and magic workers. (cont.)



Drum Wellness Circle, August 2023



Sangha gathers compost, April 2023



Sangha, May 2023



Spring Seasonal Ceremony, May 2023



Summer Seasonal Ceremony, July 2023



Fall Seasonal Ceremony, November 2023

We took a vow to “Not Burn Out” and actively nurtured our connection with the land by practicing meditation in nature. A Sangha festival allowed us to meditate with Sister Chan Khong, disciple of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. The year was filled with activities that explored identity, heritage, and spiritual practices. From creating an ancestor altar to celebrating the winter solstice, the community journeyed together in mindfulness and growth.

Activated four times annually at both solstices and equinoxes, the **Seasonal Ceremony** offers a powerful tool for healing and transmutation by creating a space for the release of intergenerational trauma. Ceremony helps individuals to reclaim their purpose and to restore overall wellness across mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects and the medicine works across past, present, and future realms, creating pathways that move beyond historical pain and trauma.

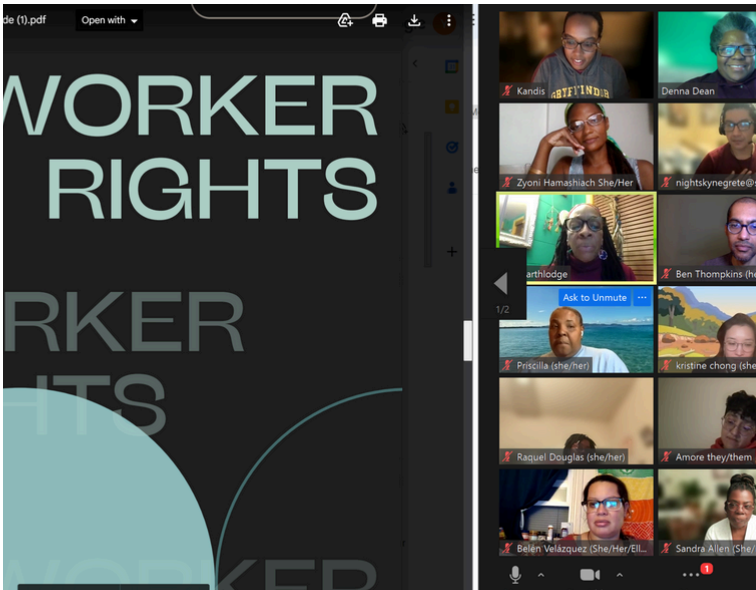
Participation is an invitation to be heard, which fosters self-empowerment, and participants entrust themselves to the elements of Earth for cleansing, and fire for transmutation. Ceremony can shift consciousness towards a more harmonious connection to the Earth and our ancestors. (cont.)



Gatekeeper Program, October 2023

Harmonizing frequencies with the ancestors, a practice rooted in African traditions, creates space for healing past relationships and reconnecting to ancestral reverence.

The **Gatekeeper Health Promoter Leader Program** offers spiritual training in facilitating ceremonial spaces and creating sacred space. Our Gatekeepers consistently practice and develop their spiritual skills and abilities, as well as practice humility to each other. Gatekeepers recognize the wisdom of life experience as ceremony, and bring that into their ceremony facilitation at the Earthlodge. They take initiative as they're guided by forces outside of themselves.



Well at Work, February 2023

The **Well at Work - Work Shouldn't Hurt Project** raises awareness for BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ workers of their workplace rights and protections while simultaneously providing accessible wellness modalities to help workers mitigate workplace trauma. By combining socio-economic justice with healing justice principles, we're able to uplift that Black and LGBTQIA+ people have a right to be well at work - free from racism, discrimination, retaliation, phobia and bias. We share mental and emotional health resources alongside state agency resources aimed at mitigating workplace trauma and exploitation.



Juicing for Wellness, July 2023

Hands on the Land: Community Botanical Gardening and Land Stewarding

centers our environmental justice work as the land herself, our physical grounds play a key role in our healing justice and community connection work. The Earthlodge Center sits in West Long Beach right next to the 710 freeway near the LA River. In addition to our Earth healing pit, over 50 different plant and tree species occupy the 10,500 square feet of land including persimmon, eucalyptus, lemon, fig, cedar and pine. The mini-forest of trees and plants are used in our work to offer the community medicinal remedies for ailments and spiritual restoration as well as to mitigate the effects of heat and pollution.

We delight in having the community to join us in taking care of our sacred grounds through gardening, composting, learning about plant and Earth medicine, and sharing meals. We learn how to make the best of our relationship with the Earth in our urban environment. At the Earthlodge we acknowledge that we occupy unceded Tongva/Gabrielino land and our work on the land employs Indigenous and Southern Black Indigenous sustainability practices.



Hands on the Land, February 2023



Community Garden Beds, May 2023



Hands on the Land, September 2023



Youth Rites of Passage, July 2023

In the Spring, the Sangha cultivated a community garden and practiced walking meditation at Willow Springs Park, where we collected mulch. The garden beds were built with the Hands on the Land crew. We restored our spiritual relationship with the land by planting the garden in meditation, laying down our prayers and hopes with seeds and water in the sun. Over the summer, the garden yielded vegetables for many shared meals.

Maylei Blackwell, Earthlodge Gatekeeper and Sangha Lead



Youth Rites of Passage, July 2023

Youth and Young Adult Rites of Passage is a program that uplifts and celebrates significant life transitions for community members aged 5-26. Organized by age, young participants engage in self care classes where they journal, learn conflict resolution skills, plant identification both in nature and in the Earthlodge community garden, and healthy eating through our juicing for wellness series. Upon finishing the program, students receive a certificate of achievement and an incentive for their participation. Our summer program has positively impacted over 150 community members from LA County in-person and virtually.



Youth Rites of Passage, July 2023

Healing Into the Holidays is the Earthlodge's elixir to cure the Holiday Blues with diverse program offerings to lift the spirit, engage the mind, and heal the body. Queen opened this year's offerings with "Are You Really in Your Body," an invitation to be present and connect with our corporeal selves. Orchid Moon walked us through the Astro Forecast heading into 2024. Gatekeepers facilitated a Diwali-centered Sangha, a Limpia (spiritual cleansing), and an Inner Ancestral Healer guided meditation. OG Gatekeeper, Agua Dulce, brought Flower Essence healing, Drum Core offered the rhythmic healing of drum, and a Sound Bath brought us healing sonic vibrations. We culminated HIH with a year-end writing workshop with guest teacher, Sharon Bridgforth.

"The fire pit and drumming created an atmosphere where I felt not only connected to the environment around us, but a deeper connection to my son. The Earthlodge provided a space where I felt safe, as though my ancestors were wrapping their arms around us like a blanket of protection."

Lelani, Earthlodge Community Member



Winter Seasonal Ceremony, December 2023



Sound Bath in Community, Kwanza 2023



Winter Seasonal Ceremony, December 2023

Mental Health Limpia is a community wellness circle to write the journey of our mental and emotional well-being. We became aware of our growths, shared our triumphs, and listened to the Spirit and the Earth for guidance and medicine. In an enclosed space, we conducted healing cleanses/limpias, using herbal medicine, steam, drum, and our collective dreams.



Mental Health Limpia, December 2023

"The Earthlodge has played a pivotal role in supporting and expanding the Black Health Equity Collaborative while being the only organization in Long Beach providing healing services grounded in Black Indigenous healing practices. They provide a place for all people to truly experience holistic health stemming from being at one with Mother Nature and our community. I have had some of my first experiences with holistic health with the Earthlodge. I was able to enter a healing Earth Pit which was a transformative experience. I remember feeling more grounded with myself as I was able to release the burdens I was experiencing at the time. I also played my first African Drum while attending a community event in which the Earthlodge not only taught the community about how to play, but about the history of African drumming. Earthlodge is a necessary pillar in our community, particularly the Black Queer community where those intersections are often unrecognized in nonprofit spaces."

Amber Johnson PhD, MPH, community partner



Sound Healing, November 2023

Sound Healing Meditation is a practice of using singing bowl and bell instruments to produce a deep immersion in sonic vibrations and frequencies that work to unlock, balance or redirect energy (chakras) in the body, mind, and spirit. We experienced calm relaxation, reduced stress and anxiety, melted into the harmonious sound, and found deep restfulness in the sacred Earth Pit.

"I could feel the vibrations of the drums throughout my entire body. I was moved deeply and felt light surrounding me. However, I also did not know what to do because it was my first visit. So I focused on a space through the avocado branches that allowed me to see the sky and the light. As the drums vibrated the tree danced. My heart was open and my soul was full. We each had a turn in the center of the circle. Once my turn came, strong powerful emotions took over me. I released so many things into the circle. When I returned to my seat. I knew everything would be okay."

L Belle Down, Earthlodge Community Member

Partnerships

Southern California Black Worker Hub (SCBWH) for Regional Organizing expands the field of Black worker organizing by consolidating and coordinating functions, sharing best practices, and collectivizing sustainability approaches needed to develop Black Worker Centers across the region and unify Black worker voice and power in Southern California and beyond. The Earthlodge Center is on the SCBWH board and collaborates with them in hosting monthly workshops to cultivate conversations about how Black folks can be **Well at Work** and know their rights.

Community Outreach

We had the honor of collaborating with various intergenerational communities in 2023 offering **Drumming for Wellness** workshops. Our thriving partnerships with Southern California Black Workers Hub, Behavioral Health Equity Collaborative (BHEC), California Workers Outreach Project (CWOP), City of Long Beach Health Department, and the City of Long Beach Parks and Recreation have grown allowing our programs to serve over 3,500 community members and families.

The Earthlodge was called upon as a first response organization in response to a tragic incident of gun violence at North Pointe apartments in Long Beach. We participated in the grief circle, conducted a healing drum class, and offered tableside programming to support and educate residents on self-care and wellness during such a tragic time.

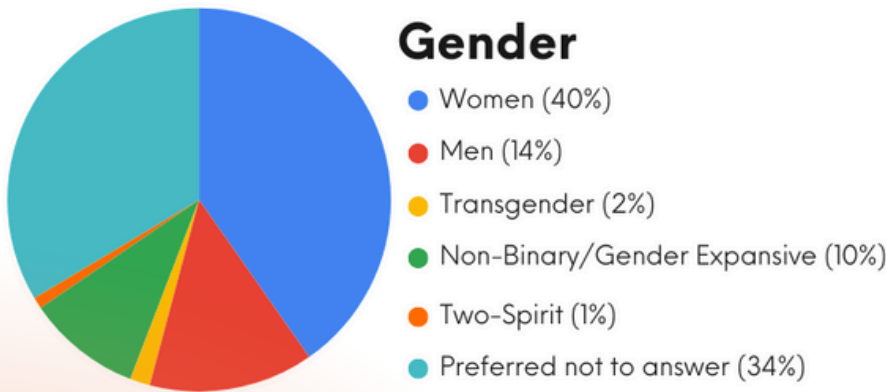
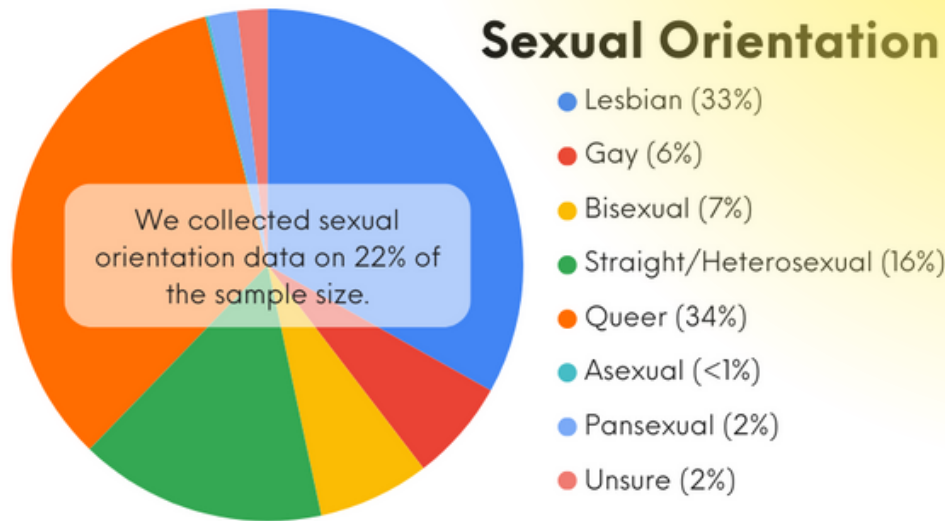


Various in community programming events presented to the SCBWH, 2023

We also collaborated with wellness centers located at Renaissance Performing Arts High School and Stephens Middle Schools to share self-care knowledge. We introduced two initiatives: **Drumming for Wellness** where drums and instrumentation are used to teach about focus and creativity allowing students to explore their musical abilities, enhancing their self-esteem and creative expression and **Wellness In Minutes**: with individualized bath salts and balancing spritzers enabling students to create their own bath salts and spritzers for relaxation and stress reduction. Through mixing botanical blends for aromatherapy, students had the opportunity to express their individual creativity while being agents of their own wellness.

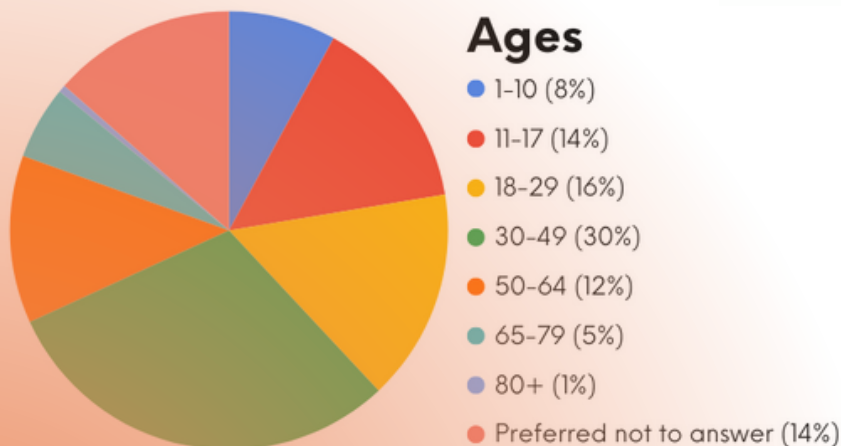
Demographics of Community Served

These demographics show our bursting diversity across race/ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation. We collected demographic information of approximately half (sample size 1,600) of the 3,500 participants that we served in 2023.



Races and Ethnicities

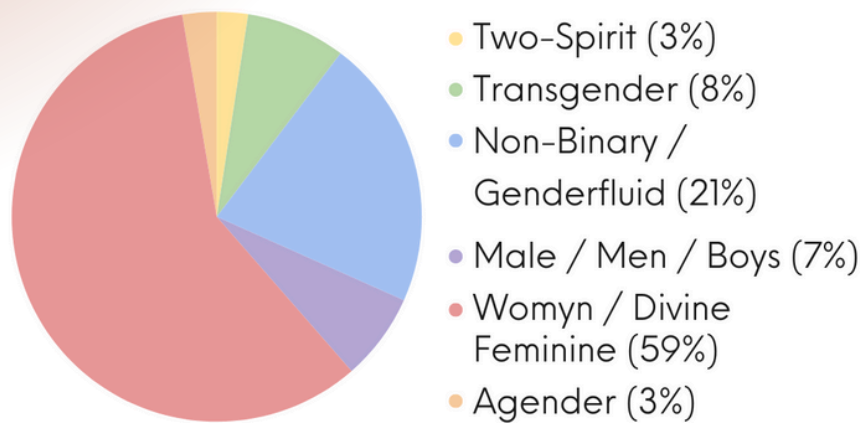
- Asian/Pacific Islander (7%)
- Black/African American (42%)
- Hispanic/Latinx (25%)
- Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous (3%)
- Middle Eastern/Southwest Asian/North African (<1%)
- White (7%)
- Mixed Race (2%)
- Preferred not to answer (14%)



During 2023, we also digitally collected demographic information as part of our wellness event registration process. This resulted in a sample size of approximately 450 community members, where our ages were evenly dispersed between 0-81 years old

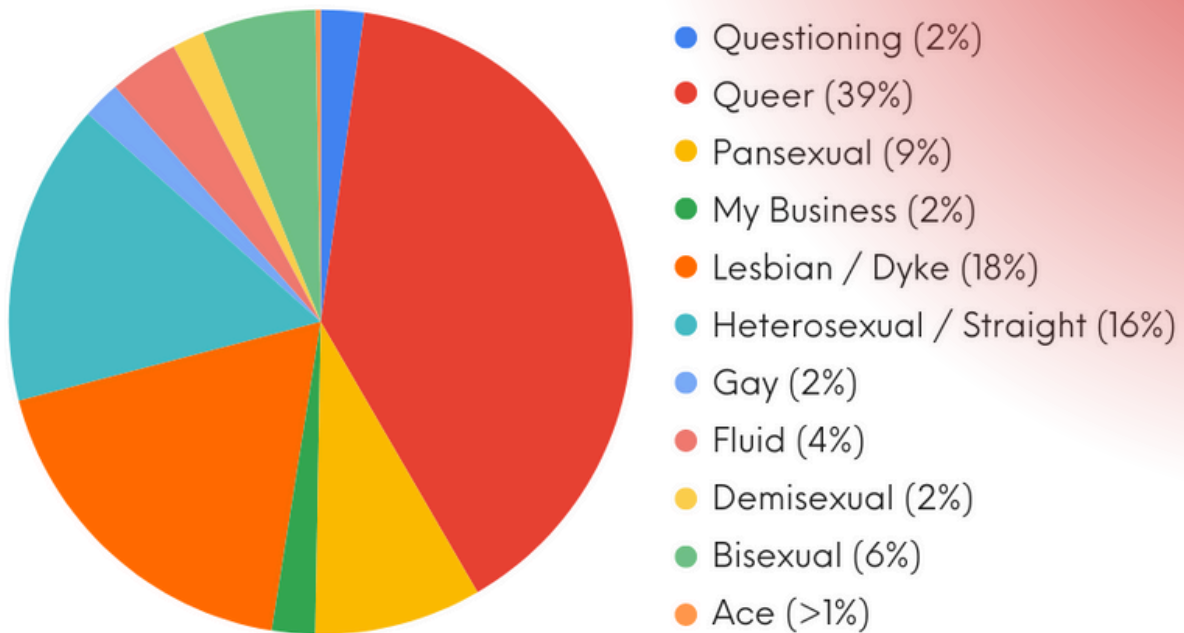
Outside of the U.S., we serve community members in 18 different countries including: **Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Dominica, France, Germany, Italy, Martinique, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Saint Lucia, The Netherlands, U.S. Virgin Islands,** and the **United Kingdom.**

The beautiful thing about gender is that participants used many more words to describe themselves than we could fit on this chart. We grouped some of those words together in order to make this chart.

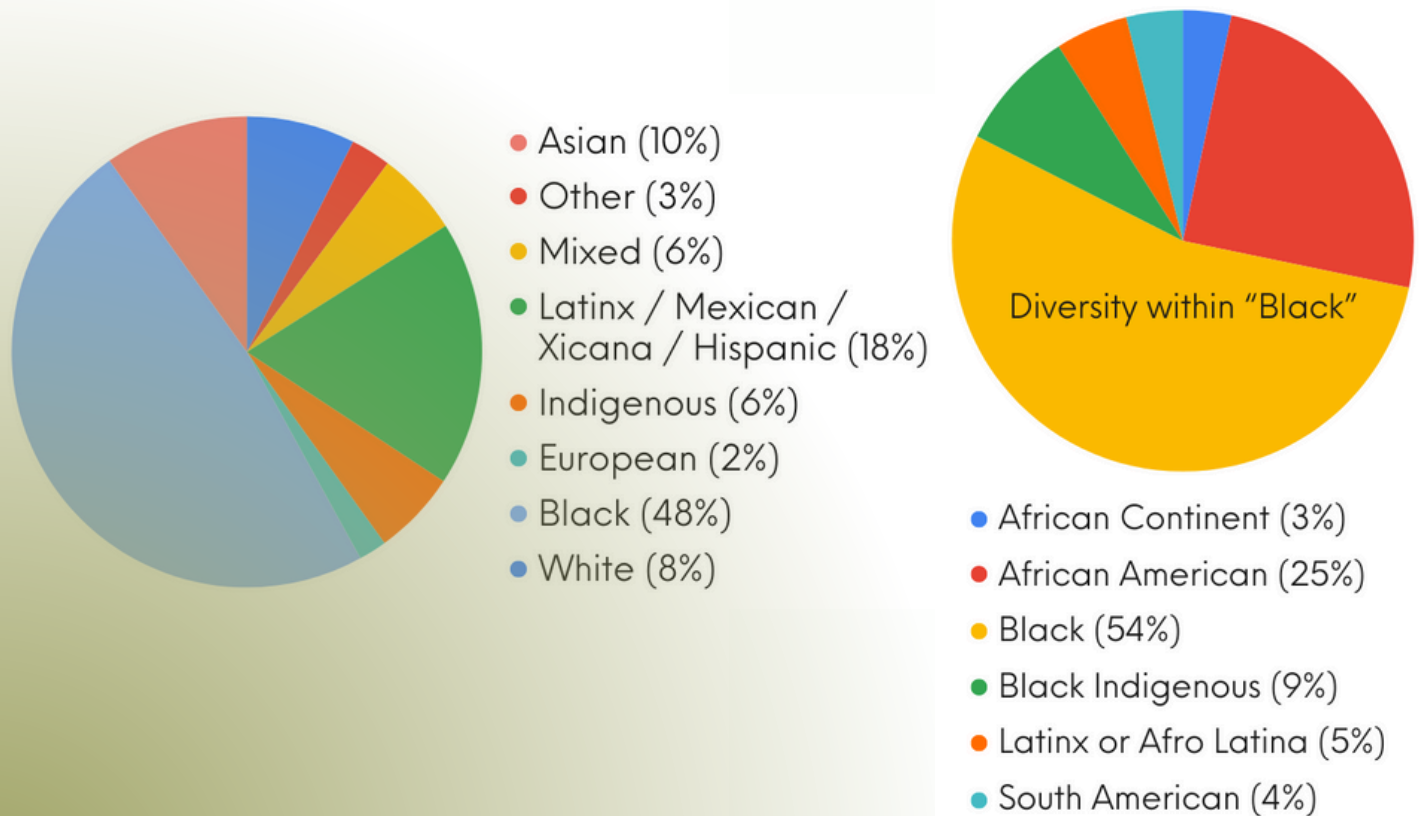


Summer Seasonal Ceremony, July 2023

Similarly to gender, our participants had so many words to describe their sexuality! To create this chart, some similar sexualities were brought together under a more commonly used word for it.



Our participants identified hundreds of categories to express their diverse ethnicities and racial identities. Below we've included basic demographics, as well as a chart showing diversity within the 48% of our Black community members.



Did you know?

Our social media reach is 3x larger in 2023 vs. 2022!

Financials

The Earthlodge succeeded in raising over \$500,000 from the sources below to serve our community and provide meaningful employment to our BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ aligned team and Healer's Network. We doubled our staff from 4 to 8 team members from 2022 to 2023.



- Government Funding (57%)
- Foundations (39%)
- Individual Donations (3%)
- Fee for Service (1%)



Volunteer Appreciation Holiday Party, December 2023

The Year Ahead

As I write this, we're entering Spring of 2024, ready to plant seeds and see what grows as we continue to care for one another. However, it's imperative that we ask ourselves "What do we want to birth?" Do we want to birth the same thing, the same sadness over again? No. **We have a responsibility to change our frequency, to step into thriving.** 2023 was a good year of assessing what belongs and what is no longer serving us. It's impossible for us to sprout if we don't recognize what we've been through, where we've come from, and where we're going. We have to be very mindful about these new seeds that we're planting, so that they don't sprout the trauma that we went through during COVID, or pre-COVID. We're new now. **We've shed the skin, we weathered the storm, and we've taken our immune systems back.** And now we're stronger than ever.

While we continue our Long Beach based programming, future projects are to develop a more intimate relationship with nature, including travel and deepening community. The dream moving forward includes developing an annual conference and co-programs with our community partner organizations such as SoCal Black Workers Hub, Dignity and Power Now, and Black Lesbians United. We have plans to travel to our community outside of the U.S. in Puerto Rico and Jamaica. And in the U.S., we would love to root a group on the land in Mississippi where we have 27 acres including a variety of plants and medicines. - Queen Hollins



Offerings, October 2023

Donate here:

paypal.me/earthlodgecenter

Find us Online!

Thank you for **Striving and Thriving** with us! Follow us online, join our events, and engage with our teachings online. Join us in remembering how powerful we are and how critical we are to the healing of ourselves, our communities, and our planet.

Instagram [@earthlodgecenter](https://www.instagram.com/earthlodgecenter)

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Sangha, September 2023

Thank You's

The Earthlodge is a collaborative project that wouldn't be possible without the support of our Board, Staff, Gatekeepers, Youth Gatekeepers, and our wonderful community of volunteers. We honor our partners, funders, and all individual donors who keep the Earthlodge moving.

For more information please contact info@earthlodgecenter.org.

