THE WORLD WE'RE BUILDING



Black Surf Santa Cruz | Fall 2026 Newsletter

An update from our community, to our community.

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Let's talk about it.

It's impossible to ignore what's happening around us. People's rights and freedoms are being taken away, communities are facing real and escalated threats to their basic needs, safety, and dignity, and the ability to organize, speak out, and advocate for one another are increasingly under pressure.

And in the middle of all of this, the organizations working within and alongside communities are navigating a landscape that makes sustaining this work increasingly difficult. We're seeing shifts in funding, increased scrutiny of equity-centered work, and growing attacks on nonprofits, particularly those led by and serving communities that have historically been excluded *cough cough BSSC cough cough****.

And the truth is, for Black-led and serving organizations like us, none of this exists in a vacuum. The same systems and inequities that made our work necessary in the first place continue to shape whose work gets funded, whose voices get heard, and whose visions for the future get supported.

And we know we're not the only ones feeling it. So let's talk about it!!

The natural instinct in these moments is to isolate and shrink.



White supremacy culture trains us to contort inward during moments of uncertainty and unease. To isolate, hoard, panic, shrink, react instead of respond, take up less space, hide, wave the white flag on hope, and fall into despair. To operate from a place of scarcity and fear rather than possibility and collective care.

And, while yes, we've had to have hard conversations, face the very real gravity of the moment we're in, and make difficult decisions. We've also had to name something else: scarcity is manufactured, and we don't actually have to take its shape.

Despite all odds, we've continued to grow. Since 2020, Black Surf Santa Cruz has directly served more than 1,800 people across all programs. We are on track to have our first-ever 500 participant year and we also launched our swimming program without dedicated funding because that's how much we believe our community deserves access to these opportunities. We're now supporting over 15 swimmers across our 'Guppies' foundations and 'Goldfish' emerging-skills groups.

I won't pretend to know exactly how we'll navigate everything ahead. But I believe it's possible because we've already seen what's possible. We've built something meaningful in the face of uncertainty, and will continue to show up for our community even when the odds aren't in our favor.

So, what does that mean for BSSC?

It means getting honest and fr about what it actually takes to sustain this work in the current landscape and beyond. It means reassessing, using history as a tool/lens, getting creative, and thinking critically about how we build an organization that can weather uncertainty without losing sight of why we exist in the first place. It also means asking for help.

Because building a world where we all feel like we belong and have equal access has to be about more than good intentions. It's about how we share resources, take responsibility, and show up for the communities and causes we care about.

And the truth is, we're building something that we believe should exist now and in the future. Against all odds. Against the very systems and ideologies that have disconnected our people from the water in the first place.

A world where Black people have access to the ocean, joy, healing, belonging, and play. A world where rest and play aren't luxuries, but part of what makes life worth living. Our work has always been about more than surfing. It's about the world we want to live in and the possibilities we're creating for the generations coming after us.

And we're going to keep building it.

This fall, we're inviting you to take a closer look at what that work looks like, what your support has made possible, and how you can help us meet this moment. Because the future isn't something we simply wait for. It's something we build together.

With gratitude and a whole lot of determination,

Esabella "Bella" Bonner
Founder & Executive Director

Black Surf Santa Cruz

LOOK WHAT WE DID. LOOK WHAT YOU MADE POSSIBLE.

Beach Ball 2026: We did that!

What a night!

Our 2026 inaugural Beach Ball brought our community together for an evening of celebration, connection, and investment in the future of Black Surf Santa Cruz. From the under-the-sea vibes to the generosity around the room, we were reminded what happens when people believe in something and decide to move together.

And here's a little more Beach Ball magic! One donor submitted an employer matching request after the event, turning their $3,500 gift into more than $18,000 in support for BSSC. Employer matching can make a BIG difference. Check your workplace giving policy to see if your donations are eligible, too!

When all was said and done, the event raised over $56,000 in total!

Thank you to everyone who attended, donated, volunteered, sponsored, helped us bring the evening to life, or simply spread the word. Every contribution played a part in making the night what it was.

And a special thank-you to everyone who continues to believe that access to water, joy, and community is crucial.

We couldn't do this without you (& wouldn't even want to!!).



MID-SEASON CHECK-IN

A whole lot is happening over here.

Behind every surf session, swim lesson, and community gathering is a whole lot of planning, relationship-building, coordination, and care. This season has been no different.

Here's a little look at what we've been up to and what your support has helped make possible.

Prepare to Pop-Up (P2PUP): Another cohort in the books!

Our sixth P2PUP cohort wrapped up this year, continuing our commitment to developing ocean confidence, environmental awareness, and a deeper understanding of the connections between our communities and the water.

P2PUP is about more than learning to surf. Participants spend more than 15 hours building skills, learning about ocean safety and environmental justice, and exploring their relationship with the ocean and one another.

We're proud of the time, growth, and community that go into every cohort, and we're grateful to everyone who helps make this programming possible.

PREPARE TO POP-UP PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS



- "I've never envisioned myself that deep in the ocean surrounded by all it has to offer (kayaking). It was unreal and unimaginable in the very best of ways."
- "We went swimming in the ocean. It was my first time and it felt exhilarating! I loved it! I felt safe and supported. This allowed me to feel okay letting go of the boogie board and swimming on my own in the ocean. The best was when I was coming in and a volunteer said "You have the biggest smile and are leading the pack!" To think of how far I have come. THANK YOU!"
- "Seeing ocean wildlife and being that close to dolphins was EPIC but getting to ask questions that I'd never been able to ask about surfing and ocean/wave basics like what happens when you fall from a board under the tumult of a wave and learning that you cover your head is just a small example of valuable information I received from this program. I'm so grateful that I had access to someone I could ask and be taught by and didn't feel stupid for not knowing the basics."

Pop-Up Program (PUP) season is here!

We're back at the beach!

We kicked off our fall PUP season with a special collaboration with our friends at PUENTES. We're always excited to partner with organizations that share our commitment to making outdoor experiences more accessible to their communities.

These partnerships allow us to build relationships, welcome new participants, and create more opportunities for people to experience the water in ways that feel safe, supportive, and joyful.

And this is just the beginning. More PUP programming is underway as we continue creating opportunities for our community to get in the water.

Here's a little look at what we do at our Pop-Up Programs:



From summer swimming to our next chapter

Swimming remains an important part of our work to expand access to and comfort around the water.

Earlier this year, our swim survey and pilot helped us learn, grow, and better understand what our community needs. We're carrying those lessons into our current swim programming, building on the relationships we've developed and welcoming returning participants alongside people who are newer to swimming.

We're excited about what we're learning and what's possible as we continue growing this part of our work.

More on that below!

SWIM CORNER

We're making waves. Literally.

Swimming is about more than getting from one side of the pool to the other. It's about confidence, safety, freedom, and having the opportunity to build a relationship with the water.

For many people, access to swimming lessons, instruction, and consistent practice isn't a given. We're working to change that.

A few updates we're excited about:

We hired a swim lead!

Growing our swim programming takes people, planning, and dedicated leadership. We're excited to have additional support for this work as we continue developing programming that meets our community where they are.

Swimmerships are making a difference.

Thank you to Outdoor Afro for helping expand access through **swimmerships**. Investments like these help reduce barriers and make it possible for more people to participate.

Community partnerships make it happen.

Thank you to the City of Santa Cruz and Harvey West Pool for helping make our swim programming possible. Access to safe, welcoming spaces to learn and practice is an important part of this work.

Our first pilot was a success!

We're celebrating what we've learned from our initial swim pilot and the fact that participants are returning for another season. That continued participation matters. It tells us that people want these opportunities and that building confidence in the water takes time, consistency, and support.

Want to help us grow our swim programming?

We're looking for additional funding and community support to sustain and expand this work.

If you believe swimming should be accessible to more of our community, we'd love to connect with you about sponsorship, funding, partnerships, or other ways to support the program.

[Support BSSC Swim Programming]



A LITTLE LOOK AT WHAT'S NEXT

The work doesn't stop when a program wraps up. Every season gives us new lessons, stronger relationships, and more ideas about what we can build together.

Here's what's on our horizon.

Wade in the Water II

We're looking ahead to the next chapter of Wade in the Water coming Feb 2027. Stay tuned for more details as we continue developing opportunities to bring our community together through water, culture, and collective experience.

Spring program season

We're already looking toward our next season of programming. That means planning, building partnerships, preparing our teams, and making sure we have the resources to welcome our community back to the water.

Liberation Paddle Out 2027

Our next Liberation Paddle Out is on the horizon! We'll be announcing the 2027 date soon. Keep an eye on your inbox and our social channels for updates.

We're excited to gather again, honor the roots of this work, and continue creating space for community, remembrance, joy, and action.

FALL INTERN SPOTLIGHT 👋🏾

Meet Jadyn-Kathleen Polk

There's a lot that happens behind the scenes at Black Surf Santa Cruz, and the people who contribute their time, ideas, energy, and care are a huge part of what makes this work possible.

This season, we're spotlighting Jadyn-Kathleen, who has been working with BSSC over the past year (& some change) as an intern through our partnership with the **UCSC Humanities EXCEL program.**



We're grateful for Jadyn Kathleen's wisdom and the next generation of people bringing their skills, perspectives, and ideas into this work. Building the world we're talking about also means creating opportunities for people to learn, contribute, and grow along the way.

[Read Jadyn-Kathleen's article that was featured in Santa Cruz Vibes Magazine]

We're so glad you're here, Jadyn-Kathleen 🖤

FALL PHOTO DUMP 📸

A few more moments from the end of summer & fall so far.

Between the big milestones and exciting announcements, there are so many little moments that make BSSC what it is.

We couldn't let them go uncelebrated, so here's a tiny photo dump of the joy, connection, and community we've been soaking up lately. 🌊



Prepare to Pop-Up Magic
We got to kayak with dolphins and otters on this day!



PUENTES x BSSC PUP
We take our joy VERY seriously.
(photo by: @harleyonthebreak)



Team Bonding
Bella, Selah, and Jadyn-Kathleen enjoying a moment!
(photo by: @jj.inthewild)



Sunday Pool Days
Closing group circle sharing progress and learned tips from the day.

THE WORLD WE'RE BUILDING

We're building what's next together.

Everything we've shared in this newsletter, from free surf programming to swimming, partnerships, and community gatherings, takes resources.

It takes people. It takes time. It takes equipment, pool access, transportation, staff, coaches, and the behind-the-scenes work that makes it possible for someone to show up and feel welcome.

And it takes funding.

As we look toward the end of the year, we're thinking about what it means to sustain this work and what it will take to keep building the future we believe in.

We're launching The World We're Building, our year-end giving campaign, and we're starting by inviting our community into the process.

Over the coming weeks, we'll share more stories about the work your support makes possible, the people who bring it to life, and the future we're working toward.

But we also know that sustaining this work takes more than sending emails and asking people to donate. It takes all of us finding ways to participate that make sense for our capacity, our relationships, and our resources.

Want to help us meet the moment?

We're looking for community members who want to help bring this campaign to life.

That might look like reaching out to friends and family, sharing why BSSC matters to you, creating a personal fundraising page, connecting us with potential supporters, or helping spread the word about our work.

You don't need to be a professional fundraiser. You don't need to have all the answers. And you don't have to figure it out on your own.

We'll provide a simple toolkit, talking points, and training to help you feel comfortable sharing our mission and inviting others to support it.

Interested in helping us build the world we're talking about?

Let us know here: [I'm Interested: Join the Year-End Fundraiser]

More details are coming soon, including our public campaign launch on November 16.

We're grateful to everyone who has helped us get here. We're excited about what's ahead. And we're looking forward to building what's next with you.

For joy. For access. For all of us.

With love and gratitude,

Black Surf Santa Cruz

Donate Here! **Join the Fundraiser!**

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Let's keep learning together.

Constant Contact

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