

# THE YOUTH TRUTH



## INTRODUCTION

The Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is pleased to share the latest edition of our quarterly newsletter, highlighting the meaningful work being done by both YEP counties and Youth Ambassadors, as well as updates on the program as a whole.

YEP, a flagship program for the Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC), and with funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), encourages youth engagement by lifting up youth voices to improve child welfare systems in local jurisdictions and at the state level.

In this quarter, the YEP continues to increase our involvement at both the local and state level with several requests for youth voice and participation.

## WELCOME TO NEW YOUTH AMBASSADORS



Over this quarter, numerous ambassadors have been added to the program. We would like to welcome: **Landon** (Mendocino), **Samra** (San Joaquin), **Ariana** (Santa Clara), **Josue** (San Diego), **Giovana** (Tulare), **Lanie** and **Leilani** (Sacramento).

## UPCOMING NEWS

- Our YEP team will be presenting about the importance of youth engagement and lived expertise at the UC Davis West Coast Child Welfare Trainings conference in September, which will be an opportunity to influence the way trainings are conducted for social work staff and other professionals.
- The YEP program published our annual report with outcomes for the year. It can be reviewed here: [YEP Annual Report FY24/25](#)



For more information or questions about the Youth Engagement Project, click [here](#), or send us an [email](#).

## YEP In Action

In April, the YEP team had an opportunity to support the important work at the **Foster Youth Education Summit**, which was held in Orange County. Eight youth ambassadors leaned into this leadership opportunity and met for numerous months leading up to the summit to create the Student Program. They created training content for the other 100+ youth who would be attending, and prepared other lived experts to be part of a panel who presented to the 800 attendees. The Student Program was very well received and attendees shared that it was the best student program they had witnessed.

The YEP team traveled to Sacramento to provide support for the **California Department of Social Services Independent Living Program (ILP) Convening**. Teams from Sacramento and San Joaquin counties shared their work around ILP as well as ways to engage youth in this important work.

The first annual **Youth Engagement Project Coaching Institute** concluded in the month of June. The program was comprised of 3 youth who were matched with coaches who are adult professionals who also have lived expertise. Feedback regarding the program was extremely positive and we hope to add additional coaches for the next cohort that will begin in the fall. To apply to be a coach or coachee, please use the following links:

[Coaches \(Adults\)](#)

[Coachees \(Youth\)](#)

Lastly, in other exciting news, the program has been in communication with several counties who may be interested in joining YEP. We are excited to support as many interested counties as possible in this fiscal year.



## YEP: A Learning Organization

Semi-annually, counties and youth ambassadors participate in an evaluation process to ensure that the program is adaptive to the needs of both youth and counties. During this evaluation process, youth shared feedback around the following topics:

1. What have you accomplished to help effect change within the Child Welfare system?
2. What (if anything) could be done in the future to help you be more successful and effective? Any lessons learned?
3. Can you provide examples on how you can do more in the areas of policy, education and ILP?
4. How do you stay engaged in long-term projects where you may not see immediate results?

The results of the evaluation will be forth coming later in the year after counties are able to share their feedback at the end of July.

To become a YEP County, please complete the brief application [here](#).

## Youth Voice Opportunities

Each month, the Youth Engagement Project receives requests from various entities to provide lived expertise or youth voice in various forums. Below is a list of those opportunities with links to recorded presentations.

- UC Davis Safety Organized Practice (SOP) Training Review- Youth Ambassadors, Tiffany and Diana, participated in a two-day training regarding Safety Organized Practice. They were able to learn the tenets of the SOP model, as well as how these concepts are shared with social workers and provide feedback to ensure the training is meaningful for those that will be using the tools with families.
- 10,000 Degree Panel - In January, Lead Ambassador Alexander Crossman and Program Director Margo Fudge participated in a panel discussion regarding the importance of educational opportunities for youth in care. [Click here to view the recording.](#)
- Youth Ambassador Selena shared compelling testimony during a press conference regarding the need for additional affordable housing. Selena was part of a group of individuals who shared the importance of housing options for individuals who may have challenges due to required credit score or income ratios. Selena was joined by Senator Dave Cortese (D-Silicon Valley), developers, housing advocates and a renter to discuss the importance of his bill SB 750 that would change the way California finances housing. SB 750 is part of a two-bill package that includes a constitutional amendment ballot measure.
- YEP partnered with Children Now and participated in focus groups to share feedback about health inequities that current and former foster youth experience.



## COUNTY PARTNER UPDATES

Each YEP county is matched with 2-3 Youth Ambassadors who are able to support county-level projects for approximately 8-10 hours per month, as counties discuss various ways to infuse youth voice and lived experience into their practices and policies. This portion of the newsletter highlights the innovative work done by several counties.

- **Glenn County** Ambassadors created a survey to identify needs of youth that are currently served by the Office of Education.
- **Stanislaus County** has established a LGBTQ+ committee which brings together members of the community to ensure that the needs of youth in care are met. As a result, Youth Ambassadors have assisted with the creation and review of surveys that will be sent out to youth who identify as LGBTQ+ as well as adult supporters regarding support, resources and feelings of safety .
- **Tulare County** created a video that highlighted the voice and feedback of Youth Ambassadors who shared the importance of quality placements/caregivers.
- **San Diego County** is creating an Independent Living Skills website with a contractor and the Youth Ambassador is reviewing materials to provide content feedback.
- **Santa Clara County** continues to work on their milestone project that includes major accomplishments for youth as they work through the Independent Living requirements.
- Youth Ambassadors have assisted **Fresno County** in their college tours, providing logistical support and outreach to universities and will be attending the tours with the youth and adult chaperones.
- **Butte County** is creating a presentation for social workers regarding ways to better support LGBTQ+ youth in care.
- **Sacramento County** has created their “Summer Express” which includes classes on budgeting, interviews, etc. The Youth Ambassadors are helping with planning, preparing and leading the classes.

## KUDOS CORNER

The Youth Ambassadors have accomplished so much during this past quarter and we wanted to take a moment to recognize their efforts! We are incredibly proud of their hard work, dedication and perseverance.



- **Jonathan (Yolo):** Jonathan has served as a mentor/college adviser for Yolo county, getting to know foster youth from diverse backgrounds and even leading a few classes on financial literacy. Recognizing that it can be challenging to develop strong relationships over zoom, Jonathan was thrilled to spend the last two weekends of June in Yolo, where he met several ILP youth that he had been mentoring for an extended period of time. Additionally, he was able to speak about his lived experience at their graduation event, attend a field trip to San Francisco, and most importantly, interact with youth who he had been communicating with remotely.



- Through the help of his YEP Coach, **Mike (Stanislaus)** authored and published his first book, an autobiography, which can be purchased [here](#). He also spent several weeks studying abroad in Taiwan.
- **Aliyana (Lead Ambassador)** had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. to represent the National Foster Youth Institute and worked alongside members of Congress to advocate for foster youth and influence legislation on behalf of the state of California. She was also recently accepted to Cal State University East Bay for a Master's in Public Administration.
- **Josue (San Diego)** spoke at the County of San Diego graduation event, where he shared his story and words of encouragement.
- **Jeran (SLO)** obtained a full-time position working in welding and construction.
- **Anthony (San Bernardino)** spent several weeks training to fight wildfires.
- **Emily (Santa Clara)** handed out medical supplies, food and water at a local church.
- **Mia (Glenn)** helped 8 youth graduate from high school while achieving a 4.0 in her own grades in her college classes.
- **Brook (Yolo)** taught her younger brother how to swim.

## Graduations

Congratulations to the young adults below who completed high school or college and achieved a major milestone. We are so proud of you!

- **Chantel (Los Angeles)** graduated from Cal State University-Dominguez Hills.
- **Joseph (Riverside)** graduated from Cal State University-Los Angeles.
- **Angel (Sonoma)** graduated Magnum Cum Laude from Sonoma State University with her teaching credential!
- **Amy (Mendocino)** graduated from UC Davis and recently accepted a new role with a marketing company!
- **Leobardo "Leo" (San Luis Obispo)** graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Art, Media, and Design from Cal State University-San Marcos. Leo obtained a full-time graphic design job following his graduation.
- **Diana (LA)** graduated Cerritos College and will be starting at Cal State in the fall.
- **Morgan (Tulare)** graduated from high school.

