

Youth Engagement Project Newsletter- A New Year



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Introduction

The Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is pleased to share the third 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.

For the third quarter of the year, the YEP program has been extremely busy as we continue to grow and being asked to be present in more spaces. Youth Ambassadors have become more comfortable in their roles with their counties and are working hard on their various focus areas.

In addition, the program recently received the program evaluation and the findings were very positive. Overall, nearly 90% of the Ambassadors felt that they were making an impact on the child welfare system. They also shared that YEP creates self-efficacy, and gives ambassadors hope for the future, facilitates their own healing from past traumatic events, and provides opportunities to practice professional skills, widen their networks and advocate for change.

In other exciting news, the program has added San Francisco and Marin as new county partners, and are in the process of identifying youth ambassadors to support their vision and efforts around youth engagement.

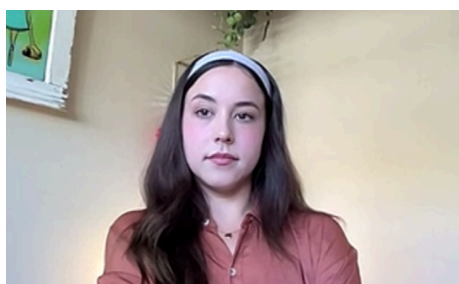
Lastly, YEP, in conjunction with staff from Preventing and Addressing Child Trafficking has created a best practices guide for engaging those with lived expertise.

Youth Ambassador Updates

This quarter has proven to be very busy for the youth ambassadors with numerous requests for youth voice opportunities, with some examples listed below:

Statewide Prevention Convening- Sophia Jeffe and Nancy Perez both provide opening remarks at the Statewide Prevention Convening in March. Both Youth Ambassadors shared a bit about themselves and why it is so important to use youth voice to do prevention work. Their commentary was extremely well received.

California Human Services Committee-Lauren Mendez and Sophia Jeffe, both Youth Ambassadors, testified in front of the California Senate Human Services Committee about their experiences in the child welfare system and why a Kin-First Culture is so important. They showed courage and resilience as they discussed the need for improved oversight and structure within the system, as well as greater engagement with potential relatives. Not only was the impact of their experiences and wisdom felt in the moment, but may influence child welfare system improvement in the years to come.



To watch Lauren testify at the State Senate Hearing, [click here](#).

To watch Sophia testify at the State Senate Hearing, [click here](#).

2024 CDSS Stakeholder Meeting

In January, Michael Jaydan and Selena Latifi participated in a panel on the CDSS Stakeholder Meeting. They shared their experiences utilizing the Chafee Grant and how their social workers supported them from graduating from high school to now their pursuit of higher education.

For more information or to apply to be a Youth Ambassador, [click here](#).

CFTICANS Focus Group

On Monday, March 14th youth ambassadors met with UC-Davis to provide their feedback on how the CFT/CANS process has worked for them, and potential areas for improvement. This information will be shared with a larger statewide group to make improvements on a broader level.

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Workgroup

NYTD collects outcome data for transitional age youth through a federally created, mandated survey. In March, Joseph Mariscal joined the NYTD workgroup and provided his thoughts on improvements to the existing annual survey. The primary goal of this committee is to create a maximum of 10 more questions to better understand the needs of California's Transition Age Youth, to be determined by mid-July, 2024.

County Partner Updates

Each YEP county has been 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 Sonoma County to create system change by lifting up youth voices.

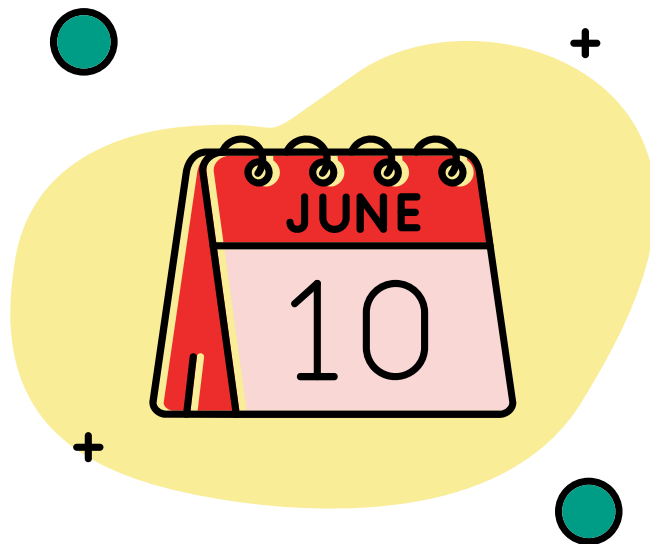
Sonoma County is using youth voice in a pivotal way by including Youth Ambassadors in their process to onboard a new STRTP provider. Youth Ambassadors Angel Burdick and Alex Crossman are part of the hiring process and requirements review, ensuring that youth voice is at the center of the clinical services for adolescents who will be residents of the facility.

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



Youth Ambassadors Speak Out

Each quarter, the Youth Truth newsletter will provide updates, advice or other facts about current Youth Ambassadors. This edition features Youth Ambassador Brisa Barragan Huerta, who supports Sacramento County. Brisa has been a Youth Ambassador for the past two years and has been busy providing various presentations around youth voice and educational outcomes for youth in care. This quarter, she has presented at the following groups: January California Foster Youth Education Task Force Meeting, 2024 California Foster Youth Education Summit, and Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program, as well as the Partnerships for Well-Being Institute in June. We are excited to see how her presentation goes at the Foster Youth Education Summit, which is being done in conjunction with Los Angeles County. We appreciate her willingness to present and engage adults around educational outcomes.



Upcoming News

Our YEP team will be coming together for our first in person event in numerous years on June 10, 2024 in Sacramento. We are thrilled to have a full day planned with both county staff and young adults to discuss the future of youth engagement, ways to strengthen county level relationships and future strategic planning. We are grateful for the collaboration with the County of Sacramento CWS for allowing us to use their office space!

If you are interested in learning more about youth engagement or the YEP, you can catch us presenting at the Partnership for Well-Being Conference in Orange County on June 14, 2024.

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

The Kudos Corner

We are pleased to recognize Youth Ambassador Alex Crossman for his work in supporting the evolution of the Youth Engagement Project. Alex is known for his vast knowledge regarding technology, and he has taken a lead role in helping redesign the YEP portal, which will give counties and youth ambassadors access to resources and statewide projects. In addition, Alex is in his final semester of graduate school at Sonoma State University and will be receiving his Masters of Business Administration in May. Congratulations Alex, we are so very proud of you!

