

# *Youth Truth*

## *The Youth Engagement Project Newsletter*

### *A Time of Change*



### ***INTRODUCTION***

The Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is pleased to share the first edition of our quarterly newsletter, highlighting the amazing 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.

The past six months have been filled with transformational change for the program. We grew in staffing size and increased the participation from both counties and Youth Ambassadors. Utilizing a new approach, counties across the state are able to opt in to the program via a streamlined application and approval process, eliminating the need for contracts and instead implementing less formal agreements. Additionally, Ambassadors are now paid directly by CFPIC, reducing the additional workload for county staff. Youth Ambassadors are recruited by either CFPIC or directly by the counties, creating a hybrid approach that mitigates the worries of counties of being unable to recruit local youth. This approach has created a pool of Youth Ambassadors that are able to respond to both ongoing project support for specific counties, as well as broader requests from CDSS or other system partners.



# Youth Ambassador Updates

The new YEP model seeks to engage youth from across California to lend their voice and lived expertise to make change across the child welfare system. YEP currently has contracts in place with a total of 32 young adults, referred to as Youth Ambassadors who are involved in the program. The Youth Ambassadors have lived experience and come from diverse geographic locations and backgrounds. They represent 15 counties and are passionate about being change agents. Their advocacy efforts and focus areas are also diverse, ranging from educational and work readiness improvements, to sibling relationships, independent living enhancements and resources for youth in care. In addition, Youth Ambassadors receive support and professional development to further their own career aspirations and growth. For more information or to apply to be a Youth Ambassador, click here.

<https://cfpic.org/youth-ambassador-application/>

In addition to supporting the various counties, Youth Ambassadors are asked to provide their lived expertise to various statewide initiatives such as a workgroup regarding the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), Emergency Response workgroup, CFT/CANS steering committee, or prevention convening. To request youth engagement/ lived expertise for a project or workgroup, email [ayaan.jones@cfpic.org](mailto:ayaan.jones@cfpic.org).

---

## YOUTH AMBASSADORS SPEAK OUT

Each quarter, we will provide updates, words of wisdom or other facts about current Youth Ambassadors. This edition features our Youth Ambassador Mentor, Lauren Mendez.



Lauren Mendez

*I started out as a YEP Ambassador in October of 2016 for Stanislaus County. YEP taught me how to use my voice in a professional and strategic way to advocate for foster youth coming through the system. Being able to use my voice to share my experiences, what worked and what didn't work was therapeutic for me. It did more for my mental health than talk therapy ever did. My advice for our new YEP Ambassadors is to be open-minded about those who work in child welfare. You will meet a lot of wonderful like-minded advocates who are all here for one common goal, to transform the child welfare system. For youth who are thinking of applying to be a YEP Ambassador, do not hesitate. Not only is the Youth Engagement Project committed to partnership with child welfare counties where you will get a lot of experience and gain knowledge. they are also committed to helping Ambassadors reach their professional goals through support, training and mentorship.*



# COUNTY PARTNER UPDATES

The YEP program currently has 14 participating counties who have been matched with Youth Ambassadors to support their various projects.

Counties are currently hard at work developing their projects for the current fiscal year, which are listed below. Counties who wish to collaborate on a specific topic area are able to work jointly with other counties to co-create system change, and communities of practice will be created in the coming months to facilitate shared learning.

**Butte** - Developing mental health information and resource pamphlets for teens, college students, middle schoolers and resource parents of young children.

**Fresno** - Working to increase Independent Living Program participation as well as sibling connections, which may be done through focus groups and training.

**Glenn** - Working to increase Independent Living Program participation as well as resource family recruitment for teens.

**Los Angeles** - LA-Assisting youth to obtain their REAL ID through a partnership with the DMV

**Mendocino** - Working to increase Independent Living Program participation, using youth voice as part of AB2083 and improving placement options.

**Riverside** - Using youth voice to improve placement options for youth, including family finding.

**Sacramento** - Working to increase Independent Living Program participation.

**San Bernardino** - As a new county, San Bernardino will be determining their project focus areas in the coming weeks.

**San Joaquin** - Working to increase Independent Living Program participation.

**San Luis Obispo** - Including youth voice via newsletter articles, human trafficking campaign, resource guide for English as a second language youth, and creating a training for resource parents regarding sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGIE).

**Santa Clara** - Creating resources for LGBTQ+ youth, using youth voice in the Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

**Sonoma** - Creating technology for youth aging out of the system, creating a youth advisory board and using youth voice to improve the CFT/CANs process.

**Stanislaus** - Increasing high school graduation rates, attending college tours, and increasing college enrollment.

**Tulare** - Increasing Independent Living Program participation.

To become a YEP County, please complete the brief application [click here](https://cfpic.org/youth-engagement-project/).

<https://cfpic.org/youth-engagement-project/>

---

## UPCOMING NEWS

We are working hard to upgrade our YEP website which will include a calendar, message board and shared repository for meeting agendas, minutes and project updates. We hope to have these changes made in the next few months. In the meantime, check out the current site and Youth Ambassadors.

<https://cfpic.org/youth-engagement-project/>

