

Youth Engagement Project Newsletter- A New Year



The Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is pleased to share the fourth 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), 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 fourth quarter of the year, the YEP program has been extremely busy as we continue to grow in size and capacity and are asked to be present in additional spaces. Youth Ambassadors have become increasingly more comfortable in their roles with their counties and are working hard on their various focus areas. Examples of various projects and youth voice opportunities will be shared in greater detail later in this edition of the newsletter.

The YEP team came together in Sacramento on June 10, 2024 for our first in person event in numerous years. We enjoyed a sense of community and shared purpose to learn more about county projects and to meet in person. For many of the ambassadors, this day was especially meaningful as it was their first time traveling via an airplane or a significant distance. As part of the day's agenda, youth were able to attend breakout sessions related to resume building, strategic planning and gaining knowledge regarding the California Department of Social Services operations. We would like to extend our appreciation to the following partners for their participation in the convening and supporting this important work: California Department of Social Services (Deputy Director Angie Schwartz, Bureau Chief Erin Thurston and Manager Laura Underwood/TAY unit). Additionally, we want to thank the Sacramento County Child Welfare team for hosting us, and our Convening Planning Team (Youth Ambassadors Lauren, Alex, Mike, Angel and Aliyana).

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Youth Ambassador Updates

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

Partnerships for Well-Being Institute

The Youth Engagement Project was selected to present at the Partnership for Well-Being Institute held in Garden Grove, CA from June 11-14. Five Ambassadors attended the conference and the presentation was well received! In addition, the Youth Ambassadors (Alexander, Michael, Brisa, Angel and Angelique) all received some level of scholarship for their participation. Jenny Aguilar, from the County of Sacramento co-presented with the YEP team.

Foster Youth Education Summit

In April, several youth ambassadors attended the California Foster Youth Education Summit. Two ambassadors, Brisa and Hazel, presented about YEP and educational outcomes in conjunction with their program leads from the Counties of Los Angeles and Sacramento.

Technical Assistance for Resource Family Approval (TARFA)

In May, Youth Ambassador Mentor Lauren attended the TARFA meeting to highlight the work that has been done by various counties to recruit resource homes.

Peer Partner Hubs

Over the past several months, numerous Youth Ambassadors including Lauren, Selena and Aliyana, have participated in the ongoing meetings where they shared their work as youth ambassadors with those in attendance. The larger group learned more about understanding and supporting individuals with autism.

Youth Ambassadors Speak Out

Each quarter, the Youth Truth newsletter will provide updates, advice or other facts about current Youth Ambassadors. This edition features our recent video from the Youth Engagement Project Convening, which can be viewed [here](#).

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

YEP Program Enhancements

As a result of the evaluation received for the program, several program enhancements will be incorporated over the course of the next few months. The first and most significant upgrade will be the addition of Lead Ambassadors–Youth Ambassadors who have shown an aptitude to excel with the work and in a leadership role. These Lead Ambassadors will be assigned regionally to approximately 3 counties and will provide support to the other Ambassadors with project development, follow up and program design. Each lead will be allotted 20 hours per month instead of the 10 given to other Ambassadors, which in turns provides counties additional support. We want to congratulate and recognize the following young adults who have been promoted to Lead positions:



Alex Crossman

Supporting Sonoma, San Francisco, Marin



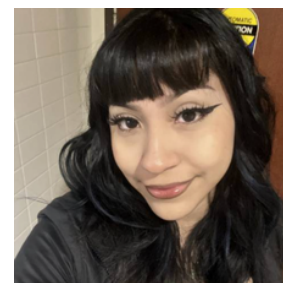
Lauren Mendez

Supporting Medocino, Tulare, Los Angeles



Angel Burdick

Supporting Plumas, Santa Clara, Nevada



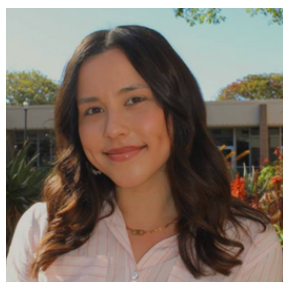
Brisa Barragan

Supporting Sacramento, San Joaquin, Yolo



Nancy Perez

Supporting San Luis Obispo



Sophia Jeffe

Supporting Stanislaus, Riverside, San Bernardino



Aliyana Montevirgen

Supporting Fresno, Glenn, Butte

Thank you again to all who applied for this position! Please read more below about our new YEP Skills Coaching Institute.

An additional enhancement to the program is the YEP Skills Coaching Institute.

The Coaching Institute is a dedicated experience for Youth Ambassadors to be connected to and receive coaching by other Lived Experts of Foster Care who have firsthand experience in navigating life after care, creating thriving lives professionally and personally. Coaches can expect to impact the next generation by focusing on three key areas: Relationship Building and Networking, Professional Development and Life Skills/Self Sufficiency. Expected benefits of being a coach include:

- Participating in a community approach to Lived Experience Empowerment (in and beyond foster care)
- Collective impact & movement toward self-sufficiency and thriving
- Supporting a current or former foster youth in developing or strengthening a skill
- Sharing knowledge = power

For those interested in becoming a YEP Skills Coach, please [click here](#) for additional information and application process.

2024 Graduation Recognition



Our Youth Ambassadors were busy during this graduation season helping their county partners celebrate those youth who have reached this important milestone. We are proud of Joseph, Youth Ambassador for San Bernardino, who was their Keynote speaker at their recent event!

Aliyana- Fresno Youth Ambassador

In addition, Aliyana, Ambassador for Fresno, attended their ILP Graduation event and assisted with planning and preparation.



Los Angeles County hosted an amazing scholarship night for college bound graduates, which included various dignitaries and a keynote address from Tiffany Haddish! Youth Ambassador Chantel was able to support this work and connect with youth in attendance.



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 two counties, Los Angeles and San Joaquin to create system change by lifting up youth voices.

Los Angeles: Los Angeles has created opportunities for youth in care to attend dedicated days at local Department of Motor Vehicle locations to obtain their Real ID. Their Youth Ambassadors have assisted in this work recruiting youth from various Guardian Scholar programs, as well as youth in care and connecting to the dedicated times to attend and have an expedited experience.

San Joaquin: In San Joaquin, the Youth Ambassadors attended ILP meetings and conducted a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) to determine how to best improve their classes for youth.

The Kudos Corner

In this edition, we will hear from several partners regarding the impact of YEP.

San Joaquin County lead, Cynthia Lederle was very appreciative of the work done by their two Ambassadors, Selena and Tiffany.

"Tiffany and Selena were amazing last night! We had 54 people in attendance including staff and Tiffany planned a little game that she played with some of the youth and went live on social media with them; it was a food challenge. Many were engaged with it and Selena was social and interacting with many of the youth as well. My team is very proud of them both and the professional growth they are making as individuals and as part of a team!"

Emma Black from UC-Davis, worked closely with the program around a CFT/CANS project. She sent the following email to Ambassadors Sophia and Sarah:

"I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to you both for your presence and participation in the CFT CANS Collaborative yesterday and throughout the past few months in planning and implementing this project. You both are AMAZING and your stories, experiences and wisdom had such an impact on the participants in the collaborative yesterday and to myself, Janice and Makayla. After you finished speaking Sophia, we needed a moment to collect ourselves and soak in everything that you shared and to reflect on your grace and kindness I know it touched us each deeply in different ways and I just want to say THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!"

Upcoming News

Welcome to our newest YEP counties!! We are pleased to welcome San Francisco, Marin, Yolo, Plumas and Nevada to the team! San Francisco has started the onboarding process and we are excited to have Suong-Thu Vo and their Youth Ambassador Josh joining the team. The other counties will be starting the onboarding process in the near future. If you are interested in learning more about youth engagement or the YEP, you can catch us presenting at the County Welfare Directors Association conference in San Diego in October 2024.

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