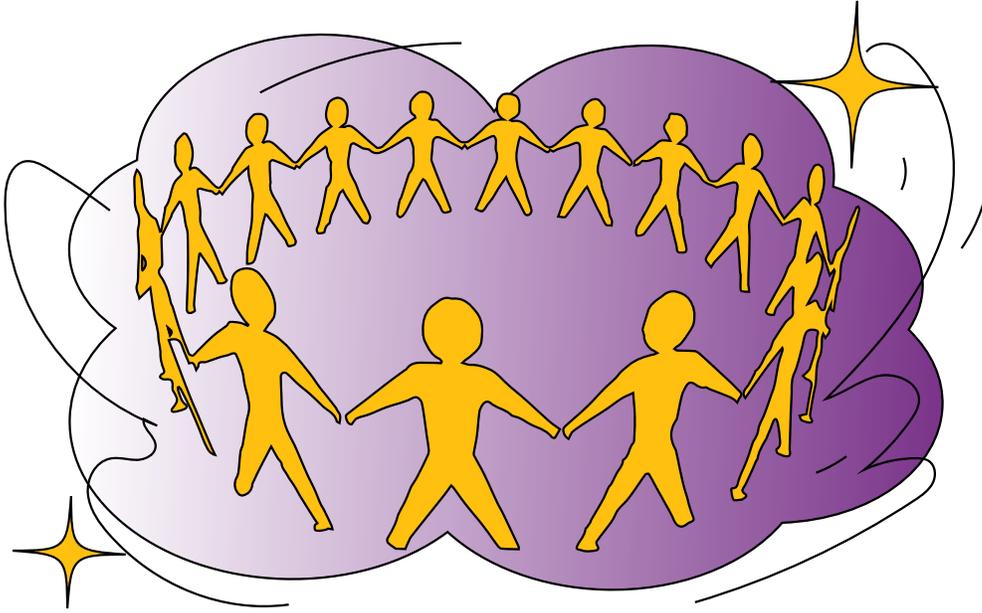




Youth Engagement Project Newsletter: Bridging and Building Partnerships



Newsletter Contents

Introduction

Ambassador
Updates

County Partner
Updates

The Kudos Corner

Upcoming News

INTRODUCTION

The Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is pleased to share the eighth 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 at both the local and statewide levels.

For this latest quarter of the 25-26 fiscal year, YEP continues to increase involvement with numerous requests for youth voice and participation. Numerous counties and ambassadors have been added to the program over this past quarter as well. We would like to welcome: Angelica (Santa Clara), Jenassey (Placer), Alisha (Placer), Jordan (Tulare), Jason (Kern), and Vee (Butte) to the team!

Two new counties, Kern and Placer, were onboarded during this quarter and we are thrilled to have them join the team. We look forward to great collaboration and system improvements. Lastly, two additional counties are actively working on their program agreement to join the YEP team, which will bring us to a total of 24 participating counties.

YOUTH AMBASSADOR UPDATES

The new year has been extremely busy for the youth ambassadors who are off and running with their respective projects. Below is a sample of all the places you can find YEP:

Statewide Prevention Convening- Aliyana, Lauren, and Angelica are participating in the Statewide Prevention Convening in various ways, ensuring that the planning of the event includes youth voice and perspectives. The convening will take place in March.

FFPS Community Pathway Advisory Committee- Selena has been actively participating in the Community Pathway Advisory Committee, contributing youth voice to the implementation of Family First Prevention Services (FFPS). The Community Pathway work supports how counties design and strengthen their prevention systems so families can access voluntary, community-based services before entering foster care. Through this committee, Selena helps ensure that FFPS planning and implementation reflect the real experiences of families who have interacted with Child Welfare.

In partnership with the **Los Angeles County Office of Education, Technical Assistance Program**, 10 Youth Ambassadors are partnering with lived experts from across the state to plan and deliver the student program at the annual Foster Youth Education Summit. The Youth Ambassadors, Mia, Lauren, Aliyana, Angel, Skyy, Maritza, Tiffany, Selena, Sophia and Mike have been working diligently to train 8 lived experts, called Lived Experienced Leaders, who will be leading the Student Training Academy, two general sessions and a workshop. The summit will be held April 19-22 in Sacramento.

The **University of California-Davis Resource Center for Family Focused Practice** has enlisted the help of Xon, Mike, Lauren and Amy to help inform the development of a script for a new video that will help youth and families better understand the Integrated Practice Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths and Wraparound.

Foster Youth and Child Welfare Collaborative- The Education and Child Welfare Collaborative partnered with 4 Youth Ambassadors who shared their stories regarding their educational journey to help educators and child welfare professionals better understand the impacts to children due to trauma, as well as successes when youth are connected to a caring adult. Thank you to Aliyana, Lauren, Maritza and Selena for sharing their stories.

Seven Youth Ambassadors were trained by **John Burton Advocates for Youth** to deliver trainings to participating counties regarding the Foster Youth Tax Credit, a great way for current and former foster youth to receive money for filing their taxes. Youth delivered trainings to Fresno, San Diego, Yuba and Placer, while connecting counties to trained tax preparers to help youth file once ready. This was the first time that youth were trained to deliver this training, and we hope to expand to additional counties next tax season! The opportunity was also shared statewide to allow non-YEP counties to receive this support.

YEP has partnered with the **Youth Law Center** to share the importance of the Quality Parenting Initiative and ways that lived experts can use their voice to improve placements for youth in care. QPI expert Terry Harak was able to attend our most recent quarterly meeting where counties and youth were touched by her story.



County Partner Updates

Each YEP county is matched with 2-3 Youth Ambassadors who are able to support county-level projects 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.

- The **County of Los Angeles** recently worked with their Youth Ambassadors to develop a virtual training for foster youth regarding attending college. The College 101 training was facilitated by four lived experts (Angel, Jonny, Mike, Mya) and highlighted the application and financial aid process and tips for being successful once accepted. If interested in having a similar training for your county, please reach out to the [YEP Leadership Team](#).
- The **County of Santa Clara** recently held youth focus groups that were led by Youth Ambassador Emily. The focus groups were designed to solicit feedback from youth regarding milestone reflection document for incentivized milestones they reach and a housing transition plan for Transitional Age Youth. Emily has worked really hard to develop the presentation for the focus groups and will continue to roll out different listening opportunities to continue to improve the county practices regarding ILP.
- The **County of Yolo** is doing some SWEET work with their Ambassadors, Brook and Jonny. Brook recently helped with two incredible in-person ILP events, a Valentine's day event, "The Power of Positive Friendships" with lunch, a program, and stations, including building your own Starbucks drink for pennies, and a Cash for College, in partnership with Yolo County Office of Education, Prevention and Wellness. Brook was an amazing help and support, recruiting attendees, and helping coordinate transportation. Jonny has been helping numerous youth navigate the college application experience and has been a big support to youth achieving their full educational potential.
- The **County of San Diego** is collaborating with their youth Mya, who is writing a monthly newsletter that is used to share information regarding upcoming ILP events. In addition, the youth have been asked to participate in a session with MSW interns to inform them about the AB12 program from a youth perspective.
- **The County of Stanislaus** is doing great work with their multi-disciplinary team meetings that focuses on LGBTQ+ youth in care. Youth Ambassador Xon, who attends the MDT meetings, has been asked to give the keynote address at the upcoming Child Welfare Disproportionality Conference that will be held on March 20 in Turlock as part of his work supporting LGBTQ+ youth.

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



Check out this lovely photo of our Youth Ambassador Brook and their Yolo County Lead Cherie



THE *Youth* ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

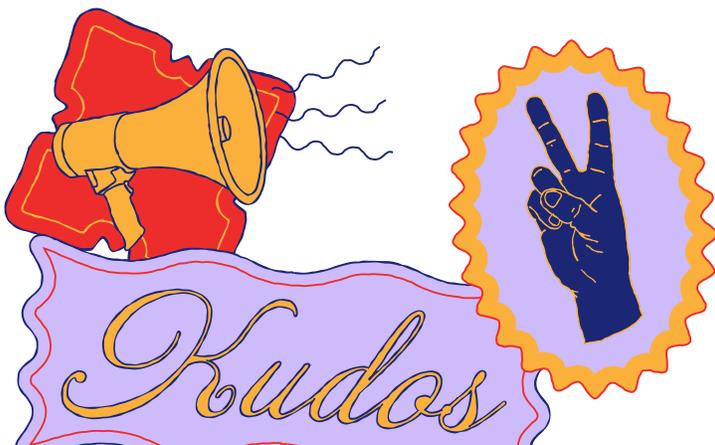


THE KUDOS CORNER

Mike recently completed a **FAFSA training** for 5 youth in LA and received positive feedback.

Rocco was able to travel to San Diego to attend the annual **Quality Parenting Initiative Training**. He was one of several youth in the room and was able to use his voice to discuss the importance of quality caregivers.

Lily has been writing articles for the **San Luis Obispo PEN newsletter** (right). She has become a gifted writer and shares youth perspectives on a variety of topics for social workers, caregivers and community partners.



UPCOMING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Youth Ambassador Mya will be speaking on March 12 at the Faith Collaborative Conference in Los Angeles with the ILP team. Mya will use her lived experience to share her stories with others.

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

Youth Perspective

COMMUNICATING RESPECT: HOW I WISH TO BE APPROACHED

BY, LGW

For me, respect isn't about big speeches or perfect words. It's about how someone approaches me, especially when the topic is hard. As a foster youth, I've lived in spaces where adults talked at me instead of with me. The difference matters more than people realize.

My preferred way to be approached starts with tone. A calm voice tells me I'm safe. An angry or rushed tone shuts me down before the conversation even begins. I need adults to assume I'm capable of understanding, not fragile or defiant by default. When someone asks instead of accuses, listens instead of interrupts, makes me feel seen rather than managed.

Timing also communicates respect. Sensitive conversations shouldn't happen in the heat of the moment or in front of others. Privacy gives dignity. Being asked, "Is now a good time to talk?" gives me a sense of control that foster youth rarely have.

Practical communication tips for foster parents start with curiosity. Ask open-ended questions and actually wait for the answer. Avoid phrases that dismiss feelings, like "you'll be fine" or "that's not a big deal." Even if something seems small to an adult, it can carry a lot of weight for a child whose life has already been unpredictable.

Honesty matters too. Sugarcoating or withholding information often creates more anxiety than the truth. When discussing sensitive topics, be direct but gentle. Explain the why behind decisions whenever possible. Knowing the reason doesn't always make it easier, but it makes it feel fair.

Above all, respect is consistency. Showing up the same way today as you did yesterday builds trust over time. Communication isn't just about solving problems; it's about building a bridge that says, "You matter here." For foster youth, that message can change everything.

