

Youth Advisory Council

UC San Diego Center for Community Health



ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

Jan - Dec 2021

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Summary

Launched in 2015, the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) brings together young leaders to advocate for healthy initiatives in communities that have experienced historical and systemic health inequities. A program of the UC San Diego Center for Community Health (the Center), housed under the Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute (ACTRI), YAC promotes and fosters culturally competent youth leadership. YAC's work is made possible through generous gifts from The California Endowment (TCE), Peace Makers Fund, Kaiser Permanente, as well as through the individual philanthropic community champions.

Despite research illustrating the positive effects of youth-led social change¹, the perspectives of young people are often absent during decision-making. In a 10-year, comprehensive community change initiative launched by TCE in 2010, youth organizing was recognized as "a strong driver of local power-building efforts".² Youth organizing enabled youth leadership development that was "capable of enriching communities for years to come".²

40+

Number of young people involved
in YAC over the school year

164

Number of hours committed by YAC interns
over the school year

While the YAC welcomes youth from any San Diego high school, students from schools located in/or serving under-resourced neighborhoods are specifically recruited. The goal of this targeted recruitment is to foster youth leadership reflective of their cultural and historical backgrounds. Consequently, the majority of YAC participants are first generation students and/or come from refugee and immigrant families. YAC elevates the voices of these diverse young people to advocate for policy and environmental changes aimed at improving health equity.

To date, YAC has trained over 110 young people on topics ranging from public health to urban planning to placemaking and advocacy.

During 2020-2021, the YAC program successfully engaged 42 youth in a total of 30 different events for a total contribution of 265+ youth hours.

1. Elaine Ho, Amelia Clarke, Ilona Dougherty, Youth-led social change: Topics, engagement types, organizational types, strategies, and impacts, Futures, Volume 67, 2015 PAGES 52-62, ISSN 0016-3287
2. "Building Power to Advance Racial and Health Equity: 10 Years of Lessons from Building Healthy Communities," CSSP, forthcoming July 2020.

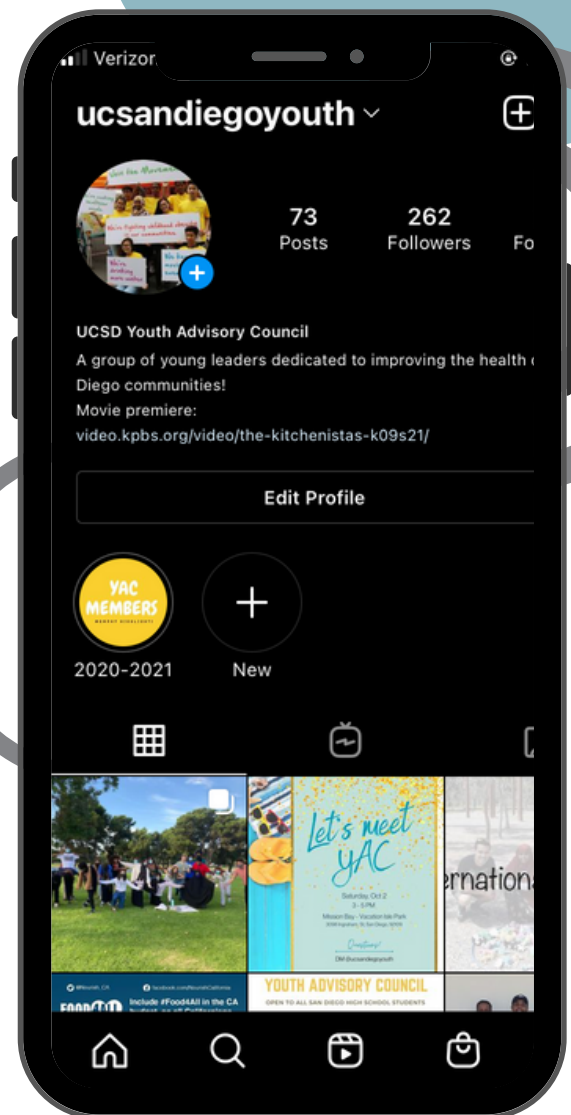
yAC in Action

Through a Zoom Lens

As an in-person program, the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) has had to adjust to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health recommendations. Throughout the year, YAC has been conducting its meetings virtually and just recently trialed an in-person meeting outdoors while following public health guidelines. Though the pandemic has caused shifts in programming, the resiliency of the youth and staff have allowed for programs to continue successfully.

“ I could not have been a part of YAC if it were in-person, given I live two hours from San Diego County. That said, I feel incredibly grateful for this online experience.

- JANESEA, GRADE 12



ENSURING EQUITY

The shift to virtual learning and living exposed the many digital inequities faced by under-resourced communities, particularly refugee communities. The ability to engage virtually is impaired by obstacles such as insufficient technical equipment and connectivity, a lack of technological knowledge, concerns about surveillance and safety, and cultural-linguistic barriers. These deficiencies can be traced to larger systemic inequities that affect communities of color on a daily basis.

YAC sought to address digital inclusivity by asking individual youth if they had access to the equipment and reliable internet connection necessary for virtual engagement, and offered means of support to address any existing gaps. As a result, remote programming helped us build equity by meeting students' needs and providing a platform for them to engage in policy meetings and develop advocacy skills regardless of geographic barriers. Remote learning also allowed more community experts to engage youth in meaningful skill building that they otherwise might not have access to.

Developing Leaders Trainings

Going virtual increased the Youth Advisory Council's access to a variety of community experts as the flexible platform allowed for more successful scheduling. Over the year, YAC staff coordinated with a record number of community experts to present to youth on a variety of topics that increased youth skills and knowledge.



DR MATTHEW HERBST

A proponent of experiential learning, Dr. Herbst shared his expertise on environmental issues in San Diego's underrepresented communities

ISMAHAN ABDULLAHI

A fierce advocate, community organizer, and nationally-recognized public speaker, Ismahan educated YAC on ways for youth to be politically involved



NOURISH CALIFORNIA

Shaping the statewide policies that impact Californian's access to food, Nourish guided YAC through the state's legislative & budget-planning process

ANDREW BLANK

With his MPH and experience in ground-level community work, Andrew led YAC through strategies for collective action

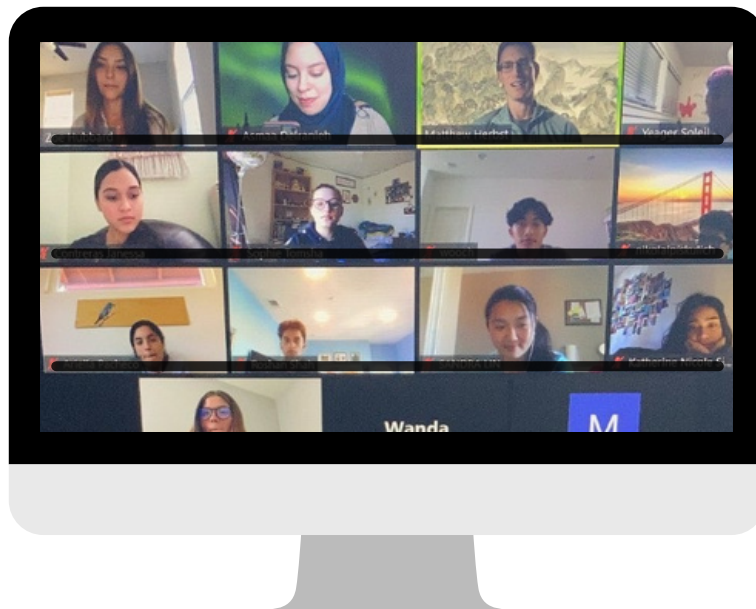


NOUN ABDELAZIZ

A YAC alumna and accomplished member of the community, Noun challenged mental health stigma and connected our youth to valuable resources

CA NOTIFY

After successfully creating their critical tool to slow the spread of COVID-19, the CA Notify team gave YAC tips on running a focus group for community input



YAC in Action

POLITICAL ADVOCACY

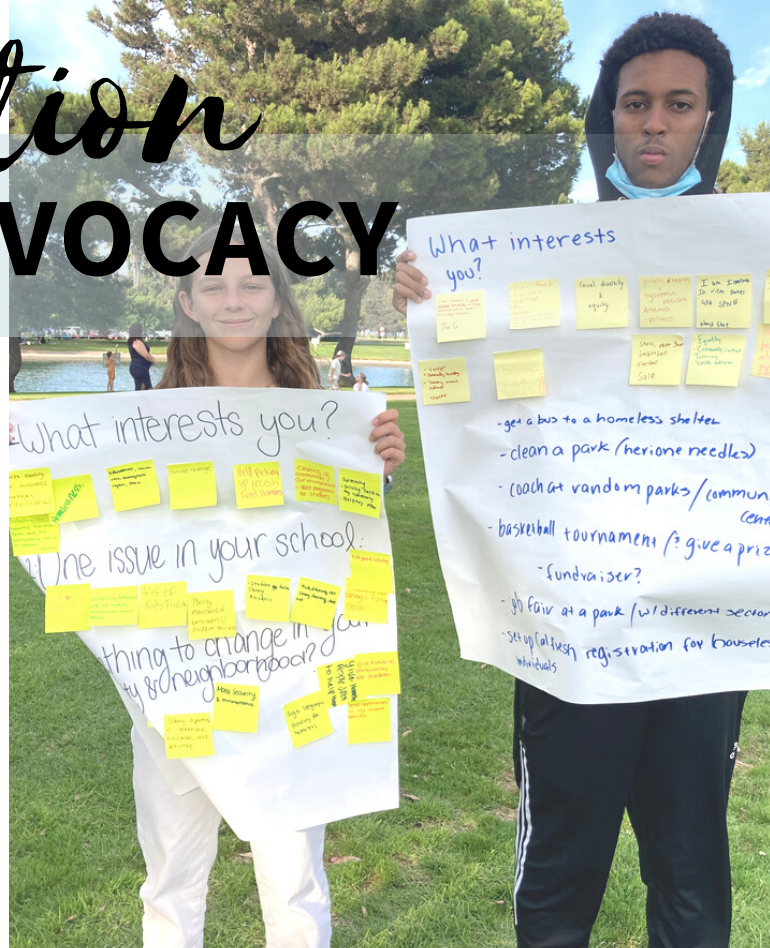
In partnership with Nourish California, YAC members led an advocacy project on the inequitable impact of COVID-19 on low-income communities and how students would like to help alleviate the burden. YAC members were trained on the fundamentals of legislation, including learning the legislative process of how a bill becomes a law and how a bill can be expedited in strenuous circumstances such as a pandemic. Thirteen YAC members then conducted information gathering by analyzing COVID-19 case rate data reported by San Diego County. Some of the data YAC reviewed and discussed were cases by Race/Ethnicity, zip code, and among persons experiencing homelessness.

Through a series of discussions, YAC members explored potential reasons for this exhibited inequity. One impact of COVID-19 that youth said needed to be urgently addressed was a rise in hunger. YAC members stated that some of their peers who rely on school meals, faced food insecurity during COVID-19 lockdowns. YAC members then collectively chose to support Nourish California's Food4All campaign to end the exclusion of immigrants from state-funded nutrition benefits.



Even if [immigrants] are able to get CalFresh, it is only accepted at certain places, most of which do not have culturally appropriate foods. And, since they already feel out of place, many immigrants don't feel comfortable asking for help.

- SOILEIL, GRADE 11



YAC Members at the Park Social Event

As part of the Food4All campaign, YAC members met with local legislators to advocate for Senate Bill 138 (SB 138), legislative action to expand the California Food Assistance Program and provide state-funded nutrition benefits to Californians ineligible for CalFresh solely due to their immigration status. Throughout the school year, YAC members engaged in strategic discussions, offered expertise on campaign development, distributed educational materials, made phone calls to legislators, and engaged others with social media content.

Youth attended 5 legislative visits and gave a total of 11 story testimonials. Two YAC members were also selected, individually interviewed, and featured in the campaign for their impact stories. These stories relayed personal testimonials on experiences with food access and raising minority voices.

YAC in Action

MEDIA

PUBLISHING AN OP-ED

In 2018, a bill that prohibited the taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages until 2031 was passed. This put the needs of corporations at a higher level than the needs of local communities. In an attempt to restore the power back to local communities, public health groups have been trying to reverse the bill and stand up against Big Soda industries by passing Assembly Bill 1163 (AB 1163). YAC Member Aisha M., had something to say about this bill and was recently featured in an [Op-Ed in the San Diego Union Tribune](#).



The message is sinking in, but not quickly enough. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and cholesterol run in my family, so I try to avoid drinking drinks like soda and sugary juices because I'm at high risk.

- AISHA, GRADE 12



Many youth are at an increased risk of developing diabetes with the overconsumption of sugary drinks and the lack of physical exercise which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The youth find this bill to be harmful and believe that these taxes should be invested back into communities that are disproportionately impacted by this bill. Thus, YAC members aimed to stand up against it by supporting AB 1163.

YOUTH IMPACT STORIES

Every person has a story that only they can tell. And that story can inspire others to open their eyes and hearts, change their minds, and take action that they may not have taken if they hadn't heard that story. YAC members Soleil Y., Janessa C., and Mahassim A. were invited to share a story about themselves and the



YAC Member, Soleil

community they organize in. They first attended a workshop where they learned the basics of story structure and how stories are used as an organizing tool. They then explored how to use the public narrative model, a framework developed by Marshall Ganz, and its three key elements:

- Story of self -- tells why you have been called to serve.
- Story of us -- communicates why our community is called to act, and why we have the capacity to lead.
- Story of now -- communicates the urgent challenge we are called upon to face now.

Finally, the YAC members were then interviewed where they gave their own "story of self" that connects them to this work and practiced sharing it with others. Read [their stories here!](#)

yAC in Action

MEDIA

YAC members had a chance to partner up with Radio Future Hour to [record two podcasts](#) that were aired on the radio! The members explored and shared relevant issues in their communities, gaining communication skills and building media coverage on pressing issues through their insightful and thought-provoking conversations.

The podcasts were an initiative to provide optimism for change. The first podcast recorded was titled “Mass Incarceration”. The YAC members that led this podcast were Shamseldin A., Jibril H., and Salah I.. The group discussed the pressing issue of mass incarceration, as well as their experiences growing up in the USA being young and black. They conversed about community role models and the importance of second chances and empathy. The members wanted to emphasize reforming a 'broken system that has remained unchanged.'

“

We need to get rid of the stigma around authority figures so that students feel safe and don't worry that they will be locked away if they say the wrong thing.

- JIBRIL, GRADE 12

”

The second podcast was titled, “The Many Complications of Covid-19”. YAC members Claire L. and Aisha S.A. led a discussion on the challenges that youth and others face under the Covid-19 pandemic. They provided a critical analysis and moral take as they discussed the difficulties many faced and continue to face.



Developing Leaders

Senior Spotlight

AHMED A. is a senior at Helix High School and has been a dedicated Youth Advisory Council (YAC) member for the last four years. Here are some facts about him!

- "I joined the YAC because it seemed like a great opportunity to meet new people and develop important skills. My aunt is associated closely with the YAC, so she referred me to it and got me interested in it originally."
- "My dream job is to become a lawyer. I want to defend people in court because I have seen many people be falsely accused and it always breaks my heart. I want to do whatever I can to stop that from happening in the future."

SOFIA P-M. is a senior at Olympian High School in Chula Vista and has been a dedicated YAC member for the last two years. Here are some facts about her!

- "I joined YAC because I wanted to learn about my community and wanted to be a part of advocating for changes."
- "My experience in the Youth Advisory Council has been amazing. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to speak to a City Council member, and practiced effective collaboration to create a project as a team."

— “ —

I have made many friends through the YAC and it truly has made a big impact on me.

- SALAHUDEEN, GRADE 12

— ” —



YAC Members at the Bowling Social Event

SALAHUDEEN M. is a senior at Crawford High School and has recently joined YAC. Here are some facts about him!

- "My best experiences from the YAC were meeting new people and talking about important subjects. I have made many friends through the YAC and it truly has made a big impact on me."
- "My dream job is to become a mortician. My uncle is a mortician and he has told me a lot about the job and the things I've heard so far sound appealing to me."

Developing Leaders

Alumni Spotlight

YAC graduates continue to grow as leaders and make profound impacts in their communities. The YAC team strives to maintain relationships with YAC alumni and support our alumni network with educational and occupational opportunities that could benefit them. Many YAC alumni continue their involvement with YAC by supporting our programming, recommending YAC to youth they know, and returning to speak at meetings.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



NGHI DANG became a YAC member her junior year of high school as part of the first cohort group. Being part of this organization provided her a more diverse community that she feels proud to be a part of to this day. She says, “It showed me that there is a lot that can be done to help the community and make an impact, no matter how small it might seem.”

Nghi graduated from The Preuss School UCSD in 2016 as part of the last cohort to receive the Gates Millennium Scholarship. This scholarship, created by Melinda and Bill Gates, sponsors students’ undergraduate and graduate education in specified fields. She recently earned a Bachelor of Science in Public Health from UC San Diego, but she’s not stopping there! Nghi is continuing her education at UC San Diego's Masters in Public Health program. With a concentration in technology and precision health, her goal is to leverage technology to address health disparities within the healthcare system.

Nghi has also [returned to the Center for Community Health](#) as staff member and is a community food specialist for the Urban Food Equity team.



NOUN ABDELAZIZ joined YAC her Junior year of high school. Noun was recently named a ‘Community Hero’ and [awarded the 2020 EmPOWERED to Serve Scholarship](#) from the American Heart Association. This \$10,000 scholarship was created to “empower college freshmen, sophomores and juniors focused on improving the health and well-being of their communities.”

Noun aims to destigmatize mental health in underserved communities which is reflected in her work. During her time in YAC, Noun focused on food policy work and appeared before the California Senate in 2017 to help pass a bill to provide the state’s students with application-free nutritious school meals. “Children shouldn’t have to go through so many barriers to access food,” says Noun, who had to fill out her own application for school meals after moving to San Diego.

Noun continues to support the Youth Advisory Council and upholds the valuable network between alumni and current members. As a Sociology major at San Francisco State University, Noun hopes to continue making a difference in her community.

yAC in Action

Starting a non-profit



ROSHAN S. is a junior and has been a dedicated Youth Advisory Council (YAC) member for the last two years. Roshan founded the organization VoicesGo in 2020 to "educate the community through outlining resources about how people with disabilities can procure communication devices to increase independence, strengthen relationships and improve their quality of life."

Here are some of the ways being a YAC member has influenced Roshan in developing VoicesGo:

What experience did you gain by being involved with YAC?

I was unaware of some the issues and inequities that were present in San Diego and the conversations we had in YAC opened my eyes to the systemic issues and how important it is to address inclusivity. An important part of this step is to be aware of the existing issues and be an ally. I strive to listen to the community I am serving by being an active listener and reach out to people to find ways to help more people.

How did YAC help with your organization?

Asmaa has been a valuable mentor by helping me make adjustments to the website. Asmaa also brought in connections with UCSD faculty, including Dr. Matthew Herbst who gave an eye-opening talk about some realities people with disabilities are facing. I greatly valued his talk as a guest speaker and wanted VoicesGo to address some of these issues.



DAXTON G. is a junior and has been a dedicated Youth Advisory Council (YAC) member for the last two years. Daxton founded the nonprofit organization Kid By Kid to enable middle and high school volunteer tutors to provide life-changing academic opportunities and support to their peers.

Here are some of the ways being a YAC member has influenced Daxton in developing KidByKid:

What experience did you gain by being involved with YAC?

The past year has taught us that we kids can truly make an impact and step up to take the lead. Our group projects provide a lot of insight and perspective about what kids my own age are feeling, thinking, and passionate about. While everyone has experienced the pandemic differently, being in YAC this year was a very eye-opening experience; hearing from my peers and conducting interviews for our project helped me apply some of this knowledge to my own life, with my friends, family and even learners and tutors within Kid By Kid.

How did YAC help with your organization?

Our YAC members are very passionate and respectful. I feel it's a safe space to talk about issues affecting all of us in our different communities. I always leave a meeting with a renewed sense of purpose and optimism. I embrace lessons I've learned through YAC and apply them to Kid By Kid's real-world model of change. As such, YAC has helped me become a better leader within my own organization.

Developing Leaders

Expanding the Team

The YAC team continues to grow as we welcome new staff and interns who will kick off the new year with a great start and are already making a big impact in the program! Get to know them a little better with this short Q&A:

FARIDA ERIKAT

What made you choose to join YAC?

I chose to join YAC because my passion is working with youth in a mentorship and leadership capacity that can facilitate their growth. What I love about YAC specifically is the youth-led initiatives that create spaces of empowerment for youth through advocacy.

What are you most looking forward to in this new year?

I am most looking forward to building meaningful relationships with this year's cohort and to creating experiences that leave an impact.

If you had to choose one food to eat forever, what would it be?

If I had to choose what food to eat for the rest of my life, it would be war'aa dawali, or stuffed grape leaves.

NASSER QADAN

What made you choose to join YAC?

I was absolutely inspired by the work YAC members were involved in. Although research has repeatedly shown the impact of youth-led change, I cannot think of many programs out there where youth are given the reins to tackle a challenge like decreasing health disparities in their communities. Advocating for health equity is something I have been passionate about for years, and it is something I would like to be involved in throughout my career.

What are you most looking forward to in this new year?

I look forward to getting to know YAC members, helping them identify causes they're passionate about, and seeing the positive differences they make in our communities. Learning from their perspectives and their work is also vital in helping me become more aware of the specific issues that communities face. To be a part of an experience that actively seeks to address these issues is an opportunity I relish, so I really can't wait for what's to come.

FOWSIYO ADEN

What made you choose to join YAC?

In 2018, a representative from YAC joined a meeting at my school to recruit ambitious students looking to make change in their community. Already being a member of a club focused on health inequity, I knew that this program would be a great space to communicate with other like-minded youth, who experience the prevalent issues in underserved communities.

What are you most looking forward to in this new year?

From being a youth member to an intern, I would really love to see the program running in a different aspect, where I am no longer the speaker, but the listener. I am really looking forward to hearing from an extremely diverse group's experiences concerning health inequity and their plans on how to improve underserved communities for the greater good.





With Gratitude

The Youth Advisory Council would like to express our gratitude for the support of our partners, who are committed to promoting health and wellness, strengthening youth voices, and building stronger, healthier and safer communities. A special thank you to the San Diego Foundation Peacemaker Donor Advised Fund for sponsoring us. Together, we are helping make a difference in the lives of so many.



LINK TO DONATE

<https://giveto.ucsd.edu/giving/home/add-gift>

STEPS

1

Click the link
above and
search 'YAC'

2

Select the fund

'UCSD Community
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Council (YAC)'

3

Select a
donation
amount

Contact



To learn more about the Youth Advisory Council and how you can support, contact or visit us online and on social media.

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