



YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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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

39

Number of young people involved
in YAC over the school year

217+

Number of hours committed by YAC
members 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 132 young people on topics ranging from public health to urban planning to placemaking and advocacy.

During 2022, the YAC program successfully engaged 39 youth in a total of 27 different events for a total contribution of 217+ 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

Advocacy

LEGISLATIVE MEETING WITH SENATOR ATKINS

YAC member Arthur Wang joined a legislative meeting with representatives from Senator Toni Atkins' office to speak in favor of the Food4All bill that aims to increase food equity across California. This meeting was coordinated by YAC Staff members, Asmaa and Farida, to support the youth and provide them with opportunities for political advocacy in topics that are meaningful to them.

As part of this gathering, Arthur provided a personal testimony as both a constituent and as a Volunteer Site Lead for the Produce Pantry Program at Feeding San Diego. Through his advocacy, Arthur emphasized the need for food justice and access to healthy food.

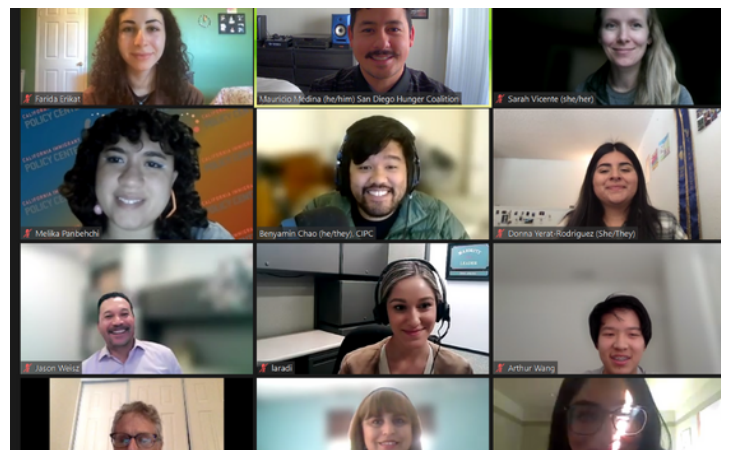
“

At the beginning of the Produce Pantry Program in August, there were around one hundred households participating. Now, the number has tripled to more than three hundred households....Finding out the hardships and challenges these people faced everyday made me realize how serious the issue of food insecurity [is].

- ARTHUR, GRADE 9

”

After this experience, Arthur shared: "I really enjoyed sharing my testimony and hearing all of the different people's thoughts and updates. I consider food insecurity a very big issue and I'm happy to see Senator Toni Atkins' office members trying their best to solve it. After attending this meeting, I learned more about food insecurity and how they cooperate together to solve problems alike."



YAC Member Arthur delivering his testimony

YAC in Action

Advocacy

ENACT DAY

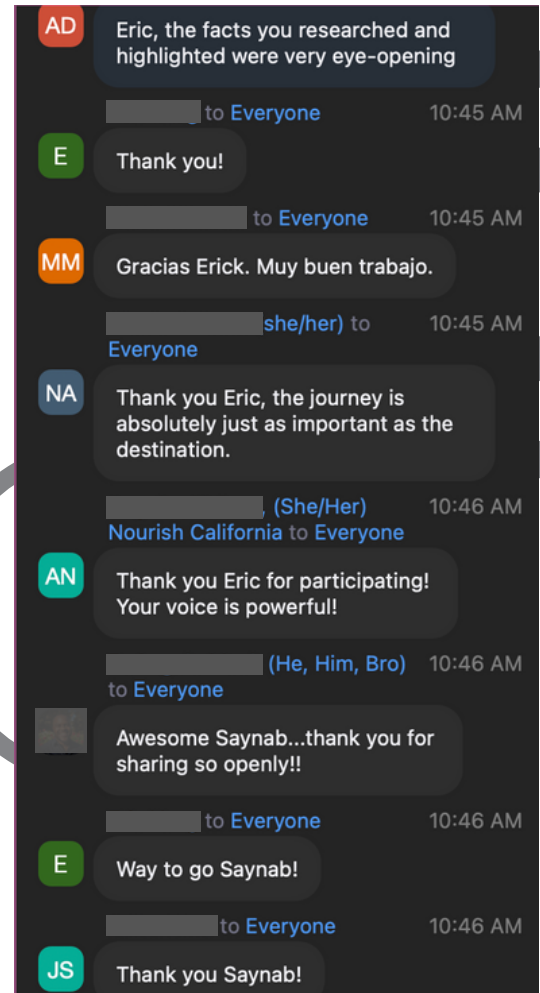
YAC members Eric and Saynab attended the 18th annual ENACT Advocacy Day, a conference that brings together advocates and legislators from across California to discuss prevalent health and equity issues and how best to resolve them. Eric and Saynab delivered statements in front of over 100 attendees about youth difficulties related to accessibility, the success of their communities, and food security. Eric and Saynab also learned about current bills working to resolve health inequities, and received training on creating and advancing their own policy proposals.

CALFRESH PANEL

YAC Member Seham spoke on a CalFresh Panel with over 120 attendees that were representing organizations focused on expanding the reach of CalFresh to those in need. The CalFresh forum seeks to educate its participants, as well as the communities those participants are connected to, on issues regarding food insecurity and its holistic effects, particularly for youth. Seham shared a unique perspective on her community's nutrition issues, and speak for a greater use of the CalFresh aid programs.

In preparation for the panel, Asmaa trained Seham on how best to choose a message to deliver and effectively reach her audience, serving as a skill building opportunity. Seham delivered a statement focused on the lack of healthy food access among the City Heights community, and called for the support for the Food4All campaign.

Her speech drew attention to the wide range of effects created by a lack of access to healthy food, reminding her audience that immigrants are not identical in their experiences and often conceal their struggle to try to fit in. She concluded with a call to action to assist with food security; Seham's speech was a reminder of the value and capability of youth in policy discussions.



Participant feedback to YAC testimonies

YAC in Action

Advocacy

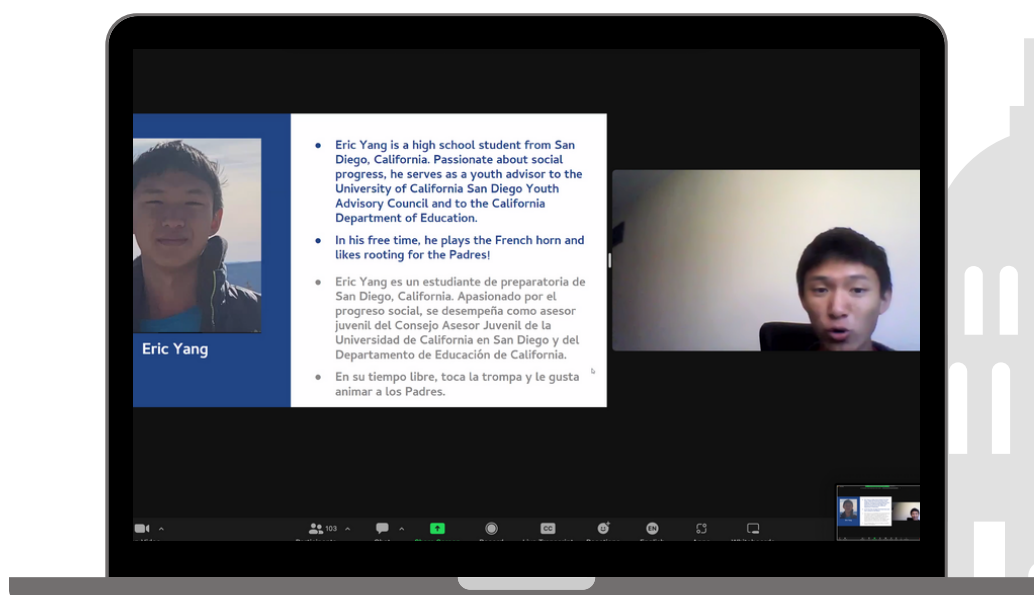
WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

For the first time in more than fifty years, U.S. President Joe Biden hosted a White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in September 2022. In preparation for this, Nourish California and the California Association of Food Banks held a virtual listening session to gather information on community priorities to end hunger and eliminate disparities.

The session was designed to hear from community members and advocates, such as YAC member Eric, in regards to community priorities for resolving hunger and nutrition accessibility issues. Eric, who is involved in advocacy at a statewide level as well as a local one, shared a story at the listening session. His experiences and passion made him a critical participant.

The White House's conference sought to recognize nutrition and hunger disparities among underserved communities in the US, and create a coordinated strategy to reform and instate national food policies. Stories such as Eric's are as valuable for the youth who deliver them as they are for the advocates they speak to. Similar to Seham on the CalFresh Panel, Eric identified and crafted the message he wanted to share, and delivered his message to an audience of older advocates. For this audience, Eric's story helped illuminate prevalent issues in underserved communities by breaking them down into components that can be addressed and generating ways to resolve those issues. His perspective was invaluable in informing the individuals who are leading the White House's national effort to end hunger and eliminate disparities.

Access the perspectives, stories, and priorities gathered through the public listening session in this [document shared with the White House](#).



YAC Member Eric sharing his story

YAC in Action

Leadership Development

UCSD Challenge Course

YAC had the opportunity to participate in the Challenge Course led by UCSD Recreation. The Challenge Course is an outdoor, adventure based team-building program designed to develop communication and teamwork through experiential activities. One of the highlights of the Challenge Course is that students have the opportunity to learn about themselves and connect with their team members while working together to devise solutions to the various physical challenges they were placed in.

“

Although I was just meeting some of the members for the first time that day, I felt as though I formed great bonds as we helped each other across the precariously wobbling wires high in the air. Wherever I looked, there was always an arm extended to help me across the next obstacle and I feel as though that is a great representation of the community at YAC-- wherever you look, there will be help to overcome the next obstacle, to solve the next problem and to eventually change the world for the better.

- ELLA, GRADE 12

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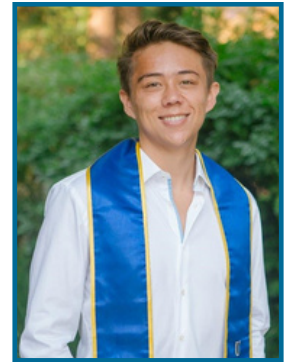
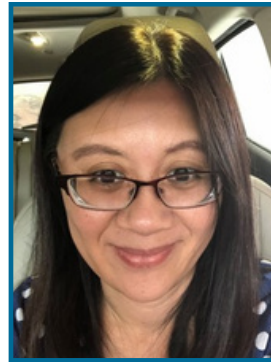


YAC in Action

Leadership Development

Public Health and Climate Action

Dr. Vi Nguyen, also known as “Dr. Plastic Picker”, co-presented with pre-med intern Riley Gilbertson on the relationship between public health and climate action. During the session, they spoke about their journeys to their current career paths and modeled mentorship in the field of environmental health. Dr. Vi and Riley also highlighted their leaded aviation fuel pollution project as a means of providing insight into tangible climate action. YAC Members expressed appreciation for the empathetic approach that Dr. Vi took as well as the personable support that she offered students.



Dr. Vi Nguyen and Riley Gilbertson

Mental Health Education

Bethlehem Wokelba and John Mollet from the Breaking Down Barriers program at Jewish Family Services facilitated an interactive conversation on mental health with the YAC. During the discussion, Bethlehem and John broke down concepts like stress, talked about the mind-body connection of emotions, and touched on how youth can utilize mindfulness to manage emotions. They concluded by providing examples of using mindfulness as part of a daily habit, and sharing resources for folks seeking support or experiencing a mental health crisis.



YAC Kayaking Experience

SAHM Conference

Several YAC members virtually attended the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (SAHM) annual conference. The conference featured discussions by leading experts on prevalent topics such as eating disorders, the impact of COVID-19 on mental healthcare utilization, and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on various age groups and ethnic minorities. The SAHM conference was an opportunity for YAC members to view their local health issues and their individual advocacy reflected on a national scale. Events such as this conference are chances for YAC members to explore the various levels of advocacy that are both available and necessary. Changing government policies becomes more clearly relevant and pressing when health issues are placed in greater visibility. As they become exposed to more spheres and scales of advocacy, YAC members can develop their interests and ideas for policy evolution.

yAC in Action

Yearly Project

YPAR Project - Photovoice

YAC members received training in an alternate method of advocacy - photography. Members learned the power of documenting experiences and using Photovoice as a research tool to highlight problems and raise meaningful questions. The creative expression of photography, as well as its ability to cross cultural and linguistic barriers, makes it valuable as a communication tool. Youth voices can be overlooked, but concrete evidence of their experiences and perspective is harder to ignore, and has the potential to target a broader audience.

HOW DOES A STUDENT'S ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCE THEIR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN VARIOUS SAN DIEGO SCHOOLS?

YAC'S RESEARCH QUESTION FOR 2022

YAC partnership with UCSD's Outside the Lens program which trained them to use their photography skills for leadership as much as observation, to support and develop their Youth-Led Participatory Action Research (YPAR Project). YAC members crafted a research question based on strengths and weaknesses, and areas of concern that they identified in their schools. They used their training on observing, capturing, and presenting different aspects of their communities to investigate their questions.



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?



JANESSA CONTRERAS joined YAC in her senior year of high school despite living 2 hours away from the city of San Diego. During YAC meetings, Janessa often spoke about the problems related to physical activity and healthy eating that she saw in her community. Janessa states "my community has the highest food insecurity rate where we live in a fast food swamp. The inaccessibility to a gym membership or a safe community to walk outdoors is prevalent."

Janessa currently attends the University of Southern California and is majoring in Lifespan Health with a double minor in Sports Media Industries and Science & Management of Biomedical Therapeutics. Her most memorable experience with YAC was working on the Food4All Campaign and getting to discuss important issues with council members and those in charge of enacting change. [Read Janessa's impact story here.](#)

Janessa's advice to those preparing to attend high school, is to "join organizations and surround yourself with individuals who share common morals and goals as you do. This experience will allow you to continue growing as a person and thrive in your environment."



ARSEMA AKLOG joined YAC her senior year of high school. She currently attends Harvard University and majors in Sociology with a minor in Global Health and Health Policy.

What is one memorable experience you had with YAC?

"My most memorable experience with YAC was being able to participate in a focus group with people from CA Notify in order to make their messaging more tailored to immigrants and communities of color."

What advice would you give to other highschoolers who are preparing for college?

"Do the things you love! Not only can admissions officers see right through things you do for the sake of the application, you will be much more fulfilled and happier when you devote your time and energy into things you genuinely care about."

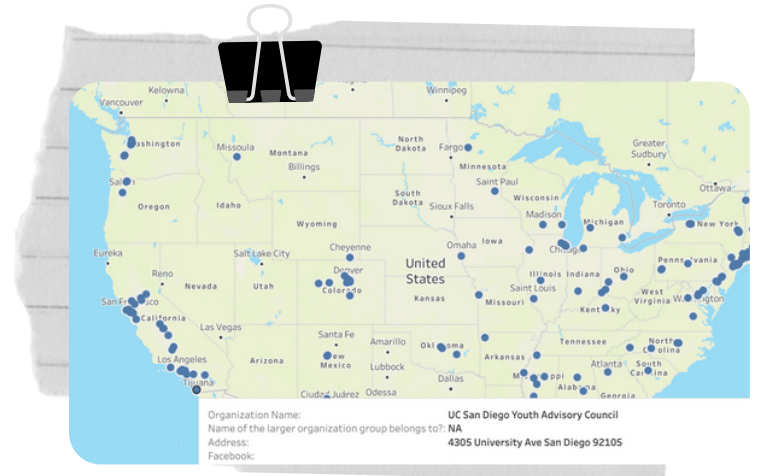
One example of a project Arsema worked on that she genuinely cares about is her independent research project on COVID inequity in San Diegan communities of color. Arsema's work serves as an example for youth to pursue topics that interest them.

YAC Achievements

Notable Highlights

NYU Database

YAC was included as a featured organization in the New York University nationwide [Parent Power Directory](#). The Parent Power Directory is an interactive map which features over 180 parent leadership organizations and will serve as a resource to partner and connect with other organizations that offer parent leadership development towards racial, social, or economic justice. The organizations that were featured completed the Parent Power and Leadership Survey, the first of its kind field scan of parent power across the country.



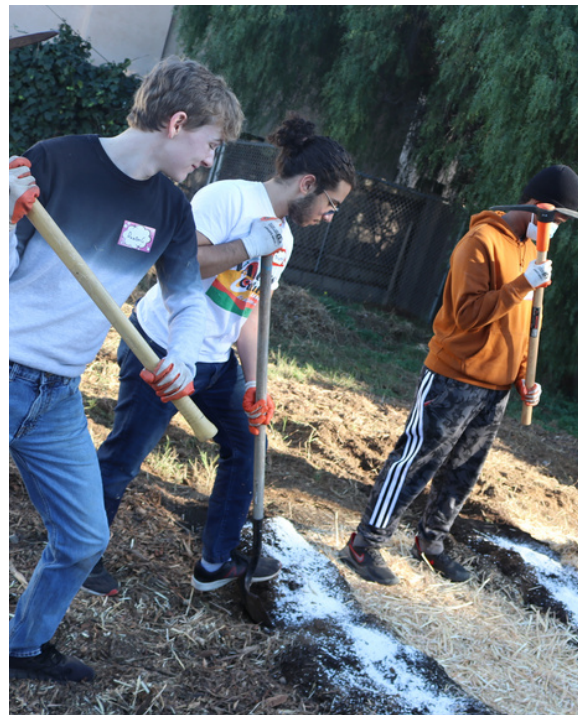
Parent Power Directory

Senior Celebration Event

This year, YAC was able to host an in-person celebration picnic after two years of hosting them remotely. Seniors enjoyed a day of activities such as volleyball, shared their memorable moments of the year over dinner, and celebrated their accomplishments. Graduating seniors received gifts to help them prepare for their coming journeys in college.



Senior Celebration Event



Pantry Revamp Volunteering



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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