

Elevating youth voice and leadership for civic impact

YOUNG LEADERS LEARNING COMMUNITY

Impact and Insights Report

MAY 2025





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About the Program

Throughout 2024, CIRCLE hosted its inaugural Young Leaders Learning Community (YLLC): a cohort of 12 young people (ages 16-29) who embody many different models of youth leadership. Convening this impressive group of young people had four primary goals:

- **A Leadership Pipeline**
To support a pipeline of leaders in the civic engagement field
- **Peer Learning**
To create a space for young people to learn from and teach each other about their areas of expertise and interest
- **A Network of Civic Leaders**
To develop a horizontal, informal network of civic leaders who could continue to connect, support each other, and grow together long after the program's conclusion
- **A Source of Youth Voice**
To serve as a source of youth voice and input for CIRCLE research programs

To advance these goals, the YLLC held monthly sessions that took on different forms. Some sessions were workshops and trainings, led by CIRCLE and external facilitators focused on skill-building and leadership development. These sessions leaned on CIRCLE's expertise in youth engagement research and our relationships across a range of fields to offer training or support in areas like financial management, organizational effectiveness, and fundraising. Throughout these sessions, we incorporated opportunities for community building and project development, allowing young leaders to get to know each other better and apply what they were learning directly to their work.

Three of the monthly sessions were facilitated by young people themselves; pairs of young leaders collaborated to lead six youth-led trainings that highlighted their unique expertise and experiences on topics like conflict resolution, racial literacy, wellness in activism, creating civic third spaces, storytelling, and a crash course on local government for activists.

Investing in young leaders through time, money, training, and relationships is essential for the vitality of American democracy. Young people lead change in their communities, but opportunities for young people to grow their skills, network nationally, and receive funds for their time and projects are few and far between. The financial support, skill growth, and network development of the YLLC supports resilience and sustainability in a sector plagued by limited resources and burnout. Past CIRCLE research highlights how having a political home—including belonging to membership organizations, having spaces to discuss issues, and being able to get support in making sense of civic information—can support civically engaged youth’s mental health.

This program sought to give young people the tools they need to make meaningful change in their community, while empowering them to see the strength of their own voices. Each of these young leaders were already shaping their communities around the future they want and deserve; the YLLC strove to build out their toolbox for change, providing training and networking that few young people receive. While the cohort was only 12 young people, their community leadership paves the way for more young leaders by modeling the power of youth voice for other young people and adults alike.

Leadership in Action: Skills, Confidence & Career Impact

After participating in the YLLC, each young leader showed growth across a range of individual-level outcomes: confidence, work skills and readiness, network development, and more.

We conducted a pre- and post-program survey measuring 16 different organizational and leadership skills. The cohort experienced growth across every skill we asked about in the survey, with the highest increases in skills related to strategy development and financial management. While young people are more likely to get opportunities to learn and practice skills like storytelling, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication in their schooling, careers, or day-to-day life, many youth are rarely given opportunities to learn how to develop a strategic plan or how to fundraise and manage funds for social change. Opportunities like the YLLC are vital to help young leaders gain these types of skills that can maximize their civic impact.

These skills also benefit participants in their current and/or future professional opportunities. While the YLLC workshops focused on developing “hard” skills (fundraising, strategic communication, relationship development, etc.) that are readily applicable to a wide range of jobs, the program was also designed to develop “soft” skills like giving feedback, collaboration, and facilitation that are equally important to learn and practice—especially early on in someone’s career. In fact, over the course of the program, some young leaders have already used their experience in the YLLC to secure new jobs or shape their career trajectories. Others planned projects that were explicitly tied to their current jobs, which allowed for direct professional development.

Throughout reflections at the end of the program, the young leaders shared that the program also increased their confidence. Carving out time to learn and practice new skills alongside peers allows young people to feel more prepared to lead, especially when working within intergenerational spaces where their voices may not be valued as highly. Participants who are not yet in the workforce felt better equipped to succeed in professional settings, while others felt empowered by being exposed to young leaders like them, growing more confident in the power of their voice in their community. Paying young people for their time and work also helped them feel like their efforts have real value.

Network Development & Peer Connection

Another intended outcome of the program was to develop relationships between young participants. Professional networks, and the social capital that comes with them, is often the product of professional experience and access to spaces that young leaders often lack. Connecting young people with others working to drive community change proved inspiring and meaningful to participants. The experience was equal parts commiserating about shared challenges and finding encouragement and inspiration from one another. Participants especially highlighted how special it was to connect with young people from such a wide range of backgrounds and areas, again showing the value of exposing young people to national networks that older adults are more likely to have access to.

“Networking was a great tool that the cohort really helped me develop. I loved getting to know everybody and the process in which I did that is something I will continue to use in the future.”

100%

of participants said they had trusted advisors after the program —up from just 50% before.

Opportunities for networking extended beyond their peers in the program, with many leaders taking advantage of relationships with the CIRCLE team and external facilitators for mentorship and support. Individual projects offered concrete ways for young people to immediately apply their networking skills to other professionals, mentors, and external partners, but some of this engagement extended beyond their project.

Our surveys showed that, after the program, participants were more likely to say they have trusted advisors they can turn to for advice: 100% of the cohort said this was very or somewhat true in the post-program survey, compared to about half in the pre-program survey. This highlights the value of connecting young leaders to mentors such as the CIRCLE team, outside facilitators, and a network of like-minded peers.

In Their Own Words

“

“I will be applying what I've learned in this program to my career in the nonprofit sector. I have used the strategies around developing a theory of change model and outlining the action steps in my new position now, as well as the skill of writing a proposal with a budget. In my role now and beyond, I will be utilizing how to create social media campaigns for development and for program.”

“

“YLLC has been so helpful in understanding all of the different aspects of leading a community. I hope to use the information I learned specifically about effective leadership in spaces with diversity (of opinion, in identity, in generation) to guide the work I carry out in college.”

“

“As a result of my time in YLLC, I will be able to navigate professional spaces (including intergenerational spaces) more confidently. My experience creating a project budget, project proposal, and implementing a project were all valuable learning opportunities as well, and I will be more comfortable designing and executing similar projects in the future.”

“

“The connections I made have been incredibly valuable and I feel like even after the program is over, I can still reach out to this network...”

“

“I learned a lot about what different communities are doing and, although it may not all be applicable to my community, I have new ideas about how to address some of the issues youth are facing and I feel even more confident knowing that there are other young people that are doing similar things and that I have their support.”

Working with Youth: Challenges & Strategies

Developing meaningful, impactful programs for young people that welcome and encourage youth voices takes care and intentionality. Throughout this project, six guiding values arose as central to CIRCLE's approach to developing programming prioritizing youth voice. While each was part of the planning and implementation of the YLLC in one way or another, by the program's close, they stood out as essential themes guiding our work and will serve as lessons learned from the YLLC that we will bring into future youth-focused work. They offer a blueprint of central considerations that can support the development of impactful programs for young people.

These values are partially derived from our previous work on [principles for youth-adult partnerships](#): a framework developed to support adults in developing effective intergenerational programs. They represent iterations and variations of those key principles, which we sought to implement and adjusted in ways that would fit this particular program's goals and needs.

Youth direction, co-creation, and autonomy

Accountability and flexibility

A whole person approach

Base building

LYPBYP: Let Young People Be Young People

Accessibility and inclusivity

1. Youth Direction, Co-Creation, and Autonomy

While much of the scope of the program was pre-defined, the CIRCLE team implemented ways for young people to shape its direction. To start, we leaned on application materials, interviews, and the pre-program survey to select priority areas for workshops, ensuring that programming was responsive to the needs and interests of the participants. We also built flexibility into the program's schedule, as well as regular opportunities for feedback, so that we could remain responsive to the young leaders' input and adjust our offerings accordingly. Additionally, through independent projects and youth-led sessions, young people were able to direct large portions of their experience, allowing them to explore the areas they were most interested in.

2. Accountability and Flexibility

To succeed in making programming youth-directed, the CIRCLE team held itself to a high standard of accountability toward the most important stakeholders in this project: the young participants themselves. We were responsible for applying input received from the cohort and informing them regularly how their input was used. As part of that process, the CIRCLE team acknowledged that we also had a lot to learn and committed to reflecting frequently on our own blind spots and areas for growth.

When program participants identified that their needs weren't being met, we adjusted our strategies. One example: when some of the young leaders, in our one-on-one check-ins, expressed they wanted more unstructured time for community-building, we shifted the session agendas to allow it. In another instance, a participant shared that they didn't understand the intention of end-of-session "exit tickets" that usually included reflection questions and space for questions. We realized it wasn't clear to participants what, if anything, we were doing based on the exit ticket feedback, so we started writing individualized follow-up messages to show participants how we were thinking about or implementing what they shared.

3. A Whole Person Approach

When we work with young people, we want them to feel seen, respected, and valued as whole persons. That means approaching our relationships with young people with care, interest, and support that extends beyond the boundaries of our work with them. Young people, whether adolescents or young adults, are often in tumultuous, highly developmental phases of life: they have a lot going on! And they bring all of that with them when they participate in our programs. The CIRCLE team works hard to build meaningful relationships with young people, so we can understand what is shaping how they show up in our shared space. We intentionally centered relationship-building, even adding additional staff capacity to the project to ensure that we had sufficient time and personnel to carefully develop personal relationships and trust with each young leader.

4. Base-Building

We designed our program to be responsive to young people's varied levels of experience and tried not to assume prior knowledge about the topics or skills we discussed. Whether by defining terms in the chat, holding space for questions, or providing explanations of skills that some might assume are basic (such as how to give effective feedback or ask good questions), we tried to make every young person feel like they belonged, regardless of their experience level. We also created space for individualized, one-one-one support so leaders had additional places where they felt comfortable getting on the same page.

5. LYPBYP: Let Young People Be Young People

There are unavoidable tensions when working with young people in traditionally adult-centric "professional" spaces. But in order to fully treat youth as experts, we have to respect and value all facets of young people's life stage. The young leaders in our cohort had different levels of experience working in formal, professional settings, and the value of working with young people is limited if we try to force them into roles as "mini-adults." To create spaces where young people can show up as themselves requires meeting young people where they're at, such as by using communication methods they prefer (tip: texts are often much more effective than emails!) and meeting during the evenings to work around school and/or work schedules.

6. Accessibility and inclusivity

From conception and recruitment to implementation and reflection, we endeavored to make the program accessible to and inclusive of young people of all backgrounds and situations. Some of the ways we tried to eliminate potential barriers to participation include:

- Paying young people for their time
- Recruiting broadly and intentionally, seeking to reach communities that often aren't targeted by youth leadership programs
- Making ourselves accessible through regular office hours and invitations to meet, so that young people felt comfortable requesting our time and getting additional support
- Acknowledging barriers to remote participation and maintaining flexibility and respect for challenges as they arise
- Always providing multiple pathways for learning and feedback to account for different learning styles and levels of comfort
- Navigating challenges such as poor attendance, last minute challenges, Zoom cameras being off, lack of engagement, etc. by leading with care and curiosity
- Planning meeting times to account for participants across four time zones, with different work, school, and childcare needs

Adapting & Growing to Incorporate Youth Voices

A Goal Grounded in Youth Experience

Beyond supporting the growth and development of young leaders, one of the intended outcomes of this program was to have the YLLC allow for more integration of youth voice into CIRCLE's short- and long-term research questions. Relying on the lived experiences and expertise of the young participants, we hoped to better shape our research agenda according to young people's input.

As the program began, it became clear that we would not be able to do this as effectively as we would want to within the time constraints we had. The CIRCLE team has thought a great deal about what effective partnerships with young people and youth input looks like. Fundamentally, it requires a significant investment of time and a great deal of care to do it well. As time went on, we didn't want to sacrifice learning and skill development opportunities.

How We Made Space for Input

Despite those challenges, we strove to give YLLC participants opportunities to shape CIRCLE research through several discrete opportunities. For instance, we used one of the sessions to have the cohort react to our [Youth-Adult Partnership framework](#). The session allowed them to discuss and share strategies for intergenerational engagement, providing both a learning and reflection opportunity for them and valuable insights for our team.

We also had the group provide feedback on several pieces of our [post-2024 election youth poll](#), which significantly improved the final version of the survey. We offered the young leaders a few different themes and topics they could offer feedback on, ensuring that these were items we could change based on their feedback given our other goals and constraints. At the same time, we gave the cohort some background on the survey and on CIRCLE's research methods in general so they would all start from the same baseline knowledge and understand why we could incorporate some changes but not others. We also used multiple pathways for young people to give feedback, including cognitive interviewing, open discussion, and opportunities for written feedback, to ensure that we were including youth with different learning styles and comfort levels.

The input we received prompted us to make several poll questions more relevant, cut vague language, add detailed context, and add more questions to clarify and deepen understanding. We used part of the next session time to update young people on how their input was used. Now that the survey data has been received, we shared the data from the sections they offered feedback on with the cohort and offered an opportunity to explore the data further by writing about it for our website.

Although we ultimately scaled this objective down in order to be more responsive to youth needs and interests, the process of developing these smaller opportunities for youth voice taught the CIRCLE team a lot about what it means to effectively partner with young people for their input and feedback. We built our skills, knowledge, and capacity in the practice of youth voice and are now better-equipped to build towards more substantive and long-term opportunities for youth voice to shape CIRCLE research and strategy.

Young Leaders Project Profiles

Read about the projects our Young Leaders Learning Community took on, the impact those projects are already having in their communities, and how our support allowed them to develop or scale their efforts.

Growing the ATL Trans Basketball League

Building joy, resistance, and community—one game at a time.

About the Leader

Solomon is the main organizer for the ATL Liberation Transgender Basketball League, a unique trans-only sports league based in Atlanta, Georgia. The league seeks to liberate the trans community in Atlanta and surrounding cities through the power of sport and also hosts events like poetry readings and grieving circles to empower the community.

Project Focus

Solomon's project spanned the league's third season and aimed to grow and strengthen the impact of the Atlanta Trans Liberation Basketball League. The league's mission is to promote transgender liberation through the powerful combination of sports, activism, and community building.

What They Did

By providing a safe and supportive space for trans individuals, the league not only offers recreational opportunities but also fosters advocacy and social change. The league operates entirely through the efforts and contributions of its organizers and players, addressing both the financial challenges of participants and broader issues of marginalization faced by the trans community. Solomon used YLLC project funds to reach over 700 people during the league's third season, with participants engaging by playing basketball or supporting events as medics, showrunners, vendors, and volunteers.

700+

people engaged with the league across one season as players, vendors, medics, volunteers, and spectators.

TRISTAN BLACK

Indigenous Democracy Initiative

Reclaiming civic space through Diné values and youth leadership.

About the Leader

Throughout 2024, Triston was a full-time youth organizer with Arizona Native Vote and now serves as their Director of Youth Programs.

Project Focus

The Indigenous Democracy Initiative aims to empower Indigenous youth by fostering civic engagement and providing educational tools grounded in Diné (Navajo) cultural values. Through workshops, leadership training, and mentorship, the project focuses on increasing youth participation in governance and democratic processes while preserving Diné knowledge systems.

What They Did

Key components include workshops on democratic principles and traditional governance, leadership development, and the creation of publications to illustrate what an Indigenous democracy looks like. Triston Black aims to preserve the Diné language and culture through civic engagement and hosted an Indigenous Democracy Symposium at the Navajo Nation Museum, which seeks to empower the Navajo People in shaping democratic spaces within tribal communities. The event highlighted the essential attributes of a democracy, traditional values in Diné culture, and opportunities in conjunction with Arizona Native Vote. Triston brought together people who care about their communities, the issues they face, and sustaining Diné (Navajo) democracy for all — utilizing the Navajo paradigm:

- **Nitsáhákéés:** to think about democracy
- **Nahat'á:** to plan/framing democracy
- **lina:** to live/take action in democracy
- **Siilh Hasin:** to reflect on what a Diné (Navajo) democracy looks



HANNAH MICHELLE BUSSA

Telling the Story of Outmigration in the Midwest

Exploring belonging, place, and the emotional landscape of migration.

About the Leader

Hannah is a writer working on a nonfiction book about the importance of place in our lives, through the lens of people leaving the Midwest, where she is from and currently resides.

Looking Ahead

Before the book is published, she is posting some of the work online:

<https://hannahmichellebussa.substack.com>

What They Did

She interviewed multiple individuals about their experiences and perspectives, either staying in, moving from, or moving to the Midwest. From the interviews conducted, she is focusing on two main themes in her book: opportunities and belonging. Her community in this project is those who feel like they do not belong where they live. Her role is to elevate these stories, highlighting why people may feel the need to leave the Midwest and what the Midwest could do to become more accessible in terms of opportunities and belonging.

Over the course of the project period, she wrote a draft proposal, consulted with an author about the publication process, and developed a broader digital strategy to strengthen her platform.

YARISA DIAZ

Supporting Trauma-Informed Education

Empowering families to advocate for trauma-informed schools.

Project Focus

Yarisa's research project aims to foster community engagement and raise awareness about the Rhode Island Trauma-Informed Schools Act. The 2022 Act established a framework for supporting students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs through trauma-informed care, but challenges like funding shortages, initiative fatigue, and staffing issues have hindered full implementation.

Why This Work Matters

This initiative empowers families to hold educational institutions accountable and ensure trauma-informed care is prioritized in schools.

What They Did

To address these barriers, Yarisa organized a focus group, bringing together students and parents who weren't well represented during the state's input collection, to discuss the plan and advocate for additional state resources during the next legislative session. Having worked with youth and having been a student in one of the districts in the state, Yarisa recognizes the importance of schools meeting the needs of students and families who have experienced trauma.

Looking Ahead

After this conversation, Yarisa was inspired to continue these efforts by mobilizing parents involved in the focus group, as many identified the lack of communication and conversations from school districts about Trauma-Informed Care in schools.

HENRY JAGODZINSKI

Visualizing Improvements to Local Transportation

Designing the future of safer, more connected mobility.

Project Focus

Henry's project centered around creating architectural renderings for the Yellowjacket Trail, a multi-use trail in Billings, Montana, which requires improvements to enhance the local transportation network.

Maximizing Impact

To maximize the impact of the renderings, Henry initiated partnerships with stakeholders across the city and developed an advocacy fact sheet to promote the trail. He also presented at the TrailNet annual meeting to advocate for this work and worked with the city to access the Capital Improvement Plan and identify funding sources. The project is included in the city's approved Capital Improvement Plan with \$1.7 million allocated for fiscal year 2029, and it has received positive press from local media.

What They Did

Henry hired LARCH Architecture to use detailed 3D modeling to produce a one-minute video of the proposed trail, which aims to connect Billings Logan International Airport to Montana State University-Billings, St. Vincent Regional Hospital, Billings Clinic, and downtown Billings. These renderings have been integrated into an informational webpage hosted by Billings TrailNet, where they will help engage the community and generate support for trail construction by showcasing the benefits and impact of the trail.

\$1.7 million

allocated to the project in Billings' Capital Improvement Plan for FY2029, receiving [positive press from local media](#).

CAMERON KATZ

Connecting Museums and Gen Z

Reimagining how museums engage the next generation.

About the Leader

Cameron is the Head of Content and Partnerships at Made By Us, a coalition of 400+ history museums and historic sites working to connect with 18- to 30-year-olds. Part of her role at the organization is to build stronger relationships with museums in the coalition so they can take advantage of Made By Us offerings, such as training, opportunities for collaboration, and nationwide events like Civic Season.

Project Focus

For her project, Cameron planned a research and content trip to Boston, MA, aimed at strengthening relationships with existing partner museums and recruiting new institutions for the Made By Us coalition.

What They Did

She had in-person meetings with Revolutionary Spaces, History Cambridge, Jewish Women's Archive, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and conducted outreach to museums not yet part of the coalition, such as the Paul Revere House, Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum, and the Museum of African American History. The trip focused on Boston to build stronger relationships with historic sites in one of our nation's founding cities ahead of the 250th anniversary of the U.S. in 2025. Through in-person meetings, Cameron was able to re-engage museum partners and invite new museums to join. Additionally, in her content-creator role, she used this trip to film content for Made By Us social media channels, aimed at engaging Gen Z by highlighting the relevance of history.

6+ museum partners engaged through outreach:

- Revolutionary Spaces
- History Cambridge
- Jewish Women's Archive
- Massachusetts Historical Society
- Paul Revere House
- Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum
- Museum of African American History

MACY KENWORTHY

Preserving Iñupiat Histories

Reviving oral traditions and honoring intergenerational knowledge.

Project Focus

The "Quliaqtuat Sisualiglu Qikiqtaḡruṅlu" (Stories from Sisualik & Kotzebue) project aims to preserve Iñupiaq oral histories from Kotzebue and Sisualik, Alaska, through interviews with local elders and knowledge holders. These interviews cover traditional and modern practices, Iñupiaq language preservation and revitalization, cultural traditions, and more.

Looking Ahead

Macy deepened connections to her community by working with the local tribal council and four different local organizations that have discussed similar projects, including a local public radio station. When the stories are published, they will be shared publicly with all Iñupiat in the NANA Region/Northwest Arctic Borough, making the interviews accessible to at least 7,000 people.

What They Did

The project began informally a few years ago when Macy recorded stories on her phone. With dedicated time and funding, she was able to invest in better technology and plan a permanent home for the recordings that would be accessible to and protected by her community. By making the recordings publicly accessible, the project will continue the cultural practice of intergenerational storytelling and ensure the knowledge is preserved for future generations, with collaboration from the local tribe and Native organizations. Macy also paid honoraria to the six elders and hunters she interviewed, which was a powerful and meaningful way to show the importance of these stories while uplifting her community members. Macy completed six new interviews, with participants sharing stories from childhood to the present, honoring the Iñupiat value of always learning from the land and the people around them. Many narratives included remembrances from childhood, with a common thread being their first memories of living off the land.

ANYA KHERA

Pushing to Lower the Voting Age

Advancing Vote16USA through data, dialogue, and local action.

About the Leader

Anya's project builds on her advocacy work for expanding voting rights at the municipal level to 16- and 17-year-olds. Since 2023, Anya has been involved with Vote16USA and currently serves as Chair of their Youth Advisory Board. In this role, she has worked to connect campaigns nationally, and to raise awareness through primary research, a [podcast](#), and local advocacy.

Project Focus

Her project aimed to develop primary research through a national YouGov survey, to understand support for youth voting in local elections, as well as perceived benefits and challenges.

What They Did

The data from Anya's survey has highlighted demographic trends in what people know about and whether they support the Vote16 movement, as well as identifying areas where people lack knowledge about Vote16. This data will be used to inform Anya's town of Wellesley, MA, about the movement, and to guide the strategy for Vote16USA. Anya hopes to continue disseminating the research and increasing dialogue about Vote16 across the country.

40%

of U.S. adults say they would have been likely to vote in local elections at the age of 16 and 17, if it were permitted.

HUDSON LOCKE

Launching the Civic Search Tool

Making civic information more accessible to youth.

About the Leader

Hudson's advocacy in his home of San Antonio, Texas, has long focused on increasing the civic engagement of young people in his community.

Project Focus

Through this work, he identified a data gap between young people and their local, state, and federal government. To bridge this gap, he developed Civic Search, an online tool designed to simplify civic engagement by helping users quickly find and connect with their government representatives at all levels.

5,000+

users accessed Civic Search in the first 2 months after launch—with no formal marketing.

What They Did

By inputting their address, users receive a comprehensive list of their elected officials along with their phone numbers, mailing addresses, and links to biographies, websites, and social media. Hudson's goal is to remove barriers to civic participation by making information easily accessible, particularly for young people who often struggle with outdated and complex government websites. Hudson juggled managing the website's UI, backend coding, server setup, and more, and was finally able to see a years-long idea come to life. The website had over 5,000 visitors in the first two months since launch, even with minimal marketing.

Looking Ahead

Hudson is continuing to scale Civic Search through outreach and improvements, aiming to make civic engagement more accessible nationwide.

www.civicsearch.com

ALAJIA MCKIZIA

Supporting Seniors through Music and Community

Using art to bridge generations and nurture joy.

Project Focus

The "Bridge the Gap" series is a two-part initiative designed to create a temporary "third space" that uses performing arts as a therapeutic medium for senior citizens, particularly those facing dementia, memory-related challenges, and other disabilities.

75+

seniors reached through therapeutic live music events across two care facilities.

Looking Ahead

After the success of these events, she looks forward to continuing to organize programs and events that support a world where art serves as a catalyst for joy.

What They Did

Hosted at an intergenerational center and a county hospital in Omaha, Nebraska, the event brought music from the local band Parfait to over 75 residents across the two facilities. The series aimed to reduce feelings of isolation, promote community engagement, and measure the impact of these musical experiences on participants' well-being. By integrating the arts into these spaces, the project seeks to enhance memory care and create safe havens for connection and joy.

Alajia's project is a pilot program for her non-profit, The Joy Ambition: an arts & cultural initiative designed to support artists and provide diverse creative experiences in Omaha.

IKE OPEYAMI

Establishing Youth Advisors for a Homeless Center

Elevating youth voices in the fight against homelessness.

Project Focus

Ike's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) initiative at the Beth-El Center, a homeless shelter in Milford, Connecticut, aims to engage local youth in addressing homelessness. The 12-member board has two key focuses: resident needs and educational programming.

Why This Work Matters

In the resident-focused portion, YAB members will hold one-on-one conversations with residents to better understand their needs and how the center can improve support. The educational programming involves youth-led presentations at community events and the local library, raising awareness about homelessness in Milford. The YAB fosters youth involvement in real-world issues, connecting them to the broader community while helping amplify the voices of residents.

What They Did

The Youth Advisory Board selected the name Youth United and meets weekly to plan events and educational programming. One of their first major events was a launch party to inform the broader Milford community about their efforts, educate them about homelessness in their community, and kick off Project Warmth, a project to create winter care packages for distribution to the homeless population in Milford.

Creating Spaces for Victims of Violence

Reclaiming voice, agency, and healing through storytelling.

Project Focus

Faria's project aims to create a supportive space for young survivors of intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence to share their stories, with a focus on consent and bodily autonomy.

Why This Work Matters

Faria's work was rooted in both their lived experience and their commitment to nurturing healing spaces where survivors could reclaim their voices and shape narratives that drive meaningful change.

What They Did

Faria designed and facilitated storytelling workshops that centered on survivor agency, seeking to make participants feel safe and empowered to share their experiences on their own terms. Alongside these workshops, Faria developed a digital platform that connected survivors with advocates, providing a space for resources, peer support, and self-expression.

Lastly, Faria curated the "Changing Hearts & Minds" art installation at UNLV, incorporating survivor stories into creative mediums to challenge stigma and spark conversations on bodily autonomy. Collaborating with community partners like ShadeTree and the CARE Center, Faria coordinated outreach efforts, secured resources, and advocated for policy changes that prioritized survivor well-being. The events fostered important dialogue on bodily autonomy and consent, helping to reduce stigma and empower survivors to reclaim their narratives.



The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) is a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States. We conduct extensive research on youth participation, and we leverage that research to improve opportunities for all young people to acquire and use the skills and knowledge they need to meaningfully participate in civic life. CIRCLE is part of the Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

Learn more at circle.tufts.edu