



In our own voices:

youth perspectives on community service



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Abrianna Morales

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The Allstate Foundation empowers people and communities so they can thrive. Established in 1952, The Foundation takes bold actions and inspires people to act by empowering youth to serve and improve communities, working to close the racial wage gap, and disrupting the cycle of relationship abuse. The Foundation also supports nonprofit leaders through the Nonprofit Leadership Center.

The Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO) is a nonprofit committed to a world where high-quality youth development opportunities are distributed as equally as the abundance of talent in our communities. Emerging from nearly two decades of groundbreaking research and incubated at The Aspen Institute, CELO bridges the gap between academia and practice to accelerate youth development and deliver on the promise of greater impact.



This youth-led, youth-driven publication builds on research reported in *Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service: A Call to Action*. Both publications are available in PDF format at www.expandingleadership.org.

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Learn more about the associate editors on page 42.



Letter from the Editors



What does “service” look like? What does it mean? How do we do it, and how do we do it well? The answers depend on who you ask.

When it comes to empowering youth to serve and asking the right questions—and people—about the state of service, it is clear that The Allstate Foundation does it best. Composed of convenings and conversations that cross sectors, disciplines, and generations, their recent efforts to generate a new definition and model of youth-led, youth-driven service, in partnership with the Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity (CELO), are as imaginative as they are innovative. They push boundaries. They pave the way for a future in which youth-led, youth-driven service is the rule, rather than the exception.



This report is no different. As a companion to *Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service: A Call to Action* (Dugan, Skendall, & Weatherford, 2024), it not only builds off of The Allstate Foundation’s recent strides in redefining youth service but also aims to represent and give voice to the young people—of yesterday, today, and tomorrow—who change their communities, and our world, by serving others.

We are very familiar with what a young person’s service journey can look like. Our own experiences have taught us just how rewarding, and just how difficult, engaging in service can be. So, when we were first approached to edit this report, we wanted to do more than ask young people questions about their service journeys and the challenges they faced along the way. We wanted to dig a little deeper. We wanted to know about their dreams and imaginations.

Our 13 associate editors—hailing from all over the United States and representing a range of ages, interests, and service

backgrounds—have a lot to say about the realities of service: what it looks like, what it means, and what it means to do well. They have just as much to say, though, about new visions of service: what it *could* look like, what it *could* mean, and what it *would* take to create a world in which all young people are empowered to serve.

We hope that this report makes it clear that the work of The Allstate Foundation—and of young people like those featured in this publication—is more than just redefining youth service. It is reimagining it. Whether you are a current or former young person, we hope that this report inspires you to imagine a world that empowers you to serve. We hope that it inspires you to imagine how you can take part in creating it.

And most of all: we hope to see you there.

Abrianna Morales
Tiana Day

“ In Our Own Voices

When I think about what service could look like, I think about recognizing leadership within our communities, the everyday heroes who just want to get up and do the right thing, not because they want the recognition, but because they want to help people. I see those individuals being uplifted to inspire, empower, and connect future generations to get involved with and understand what it really means to serve people.



The more we highlight everyday heroes – our public school teachers, our local leaders, our nonprofit leaders, our creators, our artists, those folks who just get up every day and want to make a difference because they’re moved to – the more young people can see, “okay, these are all acts of service,” and be inspired to get involved.

When we remove this kind of traditional idea of service – like service being limited to volunteering – then we reshape it into more than just individual moments. It becomes inclusive of people having the courage to get involved in a movement that’s bigger than just them. When that sense of purpose is driven through those everyday heroes that we uplift, I think service becomes more powerful to the heart and the mind for young people.

–Trey Baker, Scholastic Corporation



Reimagining Youth Service: The State of Play

Youth participation in community service is hardly something new. Whether labeled as service, volunteering, civic engagement, service-learning, or advocacy, youth have always been more than participants; they have also been drivers of service in their organizations and communities. Consider for example:

- 70% of youth ages 18-25 engage in monthly service when it is defined beyond narrow concepts of volunteering¹; and
- 62% of Gen Z believe that they can create positive change in their communities².

In fact, youth are at the forefront of some of the most influential service movements in our country's history.^{3,4} And yet, our voices and agency to define and direct the future of service have not always been recognized in scholarship and practice. This is reflected in:

- Research that presumes that the same motivations, goals, and approaches for youth service in the 1990s hold for youth today;
- An overemphasis on mandatory service and service-learning, which can be positive, but also risks reducing service to a transactional, box-ticking, resume-building process; and
- Limited pathways for youth to receive direct funding and support to launch and lead service initiatives.

The state of play for youth service, then, requires the type of [freedom dreaming](#) that Trey Baker (Scholastic Corporation) so beautifully articulates on the previous page. Youth understand how to make service “more powerful to the heart and the mind” when provided the opportunity to do so.

¹ Dugan, J.P., Skendall, K.C., & Weatherford II, G. (2024). *Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service: A Call to Action*. The Allstate Foundation and the Center for Expanding Leadership & Opportunity.

² Laughlin, N. (2020). *Gen Z's Worldview After 2020*. Retrieved from <https://pro.morningconsult.com/trackers/gen-z-worldview-tracker>.

³ Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Elliott, T. (2017). Youth, activism, and social movements. *Sociology Compass*, 11(4), e12465. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12465>

⁴ Marri, A. R., & Walker, E. N. (2008). “Our leaders are us”: Youth activism in social movements project. *The Urban Review*, 40, 5-20. DOI 10.1007/s11256-007-0077-3

This publication puts youth at the center of reimagining what service can be. Over a year-long series of cross-disciplinary, intergenerational design thinking sessions, youth, scholars, educators, and service-based organizations dreamt of three major alterations to how we think of youth service today. These are captured in the report *Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service* (Dugan, Skendall, & Weatherford, 2024) and include:

- 1 A New Definition of Service for an Evolving World**
The definition is framed through three central questions: What? How? Why?
What: Act(s) intended to benefit people and/or communities
How: By enhancing connections and relationships
Why: To address issues and strengthen communities
- 2 A Purposeful Emphasis on Youth-Led, Youth-Driven Service**
Acknowledges and centers the powerful role of youth in influencing civic and community life elevating their unique perspectives to catalyze change. The report offers six core elements associated with youth-led, youth-driven service.
- 3 Actionable Design Considerations for Advancing Service Experiences**
Provide a roadmap and tool for creating, delivering, engaging, and evaluating youth-led, youth-driven service experiences. The report highlights five design considerations ranging from access to service to reciprocity in service experiences.

In Our Own Voices serves as a companion publication to *Leveraging the Potential of Youth Service*. It builds on these core concepts by bringing to life youth realities, reflections, and aspirations for community service and its role in our lives and broader society. It also captures and expands on four core areas that youth are particularly invested in as it relates to our evolving understandings of service: (1) Youth-led, youth-driven, (2) Access, (3) Mentorship, and (4) Sustainable community engagement.

As you read through this report, you will encounter the voices of youth from across the United States individually and collectively dreaming about the future of what service should be. We encourage you to find points of connection and alignment in your own life and experiences.

We also hope you will add your own unique insights and freedom dreaming as we build a collective movement of youth-led, youth-driven service.



4 Best Practices for Service Recommended by Youth

We asked 13 young people from across the United States, “what values and practices have you found to be most effective in making meaningful change?” Here’s what they shared with us:

1 Youth-Led, Youth-Driven:

- Don’t just place youth in performative roles; give youth power in the decision-making process to enact change in your organization.

2 Access:

- Expand the notion of service from solely volunteering to include various forms of communal care including daily acts of service, activism, advocacy, and civic engagement.
- Reflect (and take action) on barriers of access to your organization or program. Provide youth with resources (e.g., financial compensation, transportation, technology) to be able to participate in service opportunities.

3 Mentorship:

- Get to know youth on a personal and professional level to provide guidance and resources specific to their social, educational, and workforce readiness needs.
- Ask youth what they’re passionate about and the impact they want to have on the world. Then 1) bring them in on complex processes to encourage their ability to navigate pathways for service, 2) connect them with opportunities and people within your network; and 3) be ready to step aside to let youth lead the work.

4 Sustainable Community Engagement:

- Research what service work is already being done in the community, then partner with community members to ensure service is sustainable and responsive to needs.
- Set up long-term frameworks for those closest to the issue to be leaders of the solution.



Youth-Led, Youth-Driven Resources

Explore more documents, research, tools, and websites to consider when designing delivering, and engaging in youth-led, youth-driven service experiences!

Are you a young person (age 5-25) involved in service?

Yes

No

Do you hold a formal leadership position within your organization?

Are you a young person (age 5-25) who is looking to get involved in service?

Yes

Yes

No



Click Here to Get Involved!

No

Utilize the best practices identified throughout this report to deepen the impact of your organization.

Have conversations with your network and friends in your community about the advice shared by other youth in this report!

Do you work with young people (ages 5-25) involved in service?

Yes

No

Discuss this report with young people involved in your organization, and work with them to strengthen youth-led, youth-driven service initiatives.

Share this report with people in your network who are involved in youth-oriented service work, AND think about how you may encourage youth engagement in your organization(s)!



1 Youth-Led, Youth-Driven: Leading the Charge for Change

Putting young people at the heart of decision-making isn't just about ticking boxes—it's about unlocking personal, organizational, and community development. When youth voices are truly listened to, young people are not just given a seat at the table, they're empowered to take charge, lead, and grow. Folding youth voices into programs and organizations isn't just a nice idea—it's a game-changer. It means we can build spaces that really understand what our communities are all about and find long-lasting solutions by teaming up with the next generation of trailblazers.

Why should youth be leading service initiatives?



I like working with 14-to-18 year olds because they are almost always the most creative, honest, imaginative, and unique people of their time. Youth are always going to be coming up in a current culture and thinking of new ways to shift that culture or show up in it. Youth seem to be natural change catalysts, driven to challenge norms and forge new paths.

I leverage that passion to create an environment and a source for them to apply it. Like, no, don't suppress your imagination. Don't throw away your passions. Instead let's create an

environment where their imagination and their passions can thrive. Not so that it's eliminated, but instead it is cultivated and nurtured on a scale where it can serve as a launching pad into their future so that they are empowered to impact the things that they truly care about."



– **Jilkiah Bryant**, *Project Powerful*

Being involved in service as a young person shaped my perspective and my positionality in the world as someone who maybe could not do extraordinary things all the time, but could commit extraordinary time to extraordinary service.



I heard someone say recently, ‘outside of love, one of the most intimate things that humans can offer is their time and their labor.’ Being able to have a real connection with various avenues of service in my youth shaped my perspective today as a government affairs professional. So whether it was sitting as a junior volunteer at the front desk of a hospital and directing family members to their relatives, door knocking with a political candidate, singing at the nursing home after church to uplift souls, or serving with Beta Club picking up trash on an adopted highway, there were so many aspects of service that I experienced in my youth that shaped who I am today.

Service helped me recognize that I may not have the most privileges, but I do have some, and I can commit my time and labor to uplifting my communities without expecting something in return. It drove me to want to be in this space of public service, to understand that, again, there are underserved populations out there. My connection to service provided the route to what I do today.

I connect all this back to one of my favorite quotes from Dr. King that he said in Montgomery, Alabama at the height of the civil rights movement. He posed to his parishioners, ‘Life’s most urgent and persistent question is, what are you doing for others?’ And I think that has guided my perspective of service. As a kid, as a college student, to an emerging professional, and even now.”

– **Antonio Scott**, *African American Mayors Association*



“ I think sometimes we’re all in our silos and echo chambers, so how do we unify amongst each other to say we’re all fighting for the same thing – justice for both the people and the planet. How are we coming together to make sure there’s solidarity amongst us in order to advance collective action?”

– Kevin Patel, *OneUpAction*

What do you want other know about leading

“ It starts with an idea and drive. A lot of young people have reached out to me saying they’d love to be involved in policy making or policy advocacy, but they weren’t sure how to start. But, it really starts with a willingness to learn. Not everyone starts out with robust knowledge or robust connections, so I think encouraging youth to roll with whatever purpose they hope to pursue is important. Really, sometimes, half of youth advocacy is just winging it, bouncing ideas off of adult mentors, and figuring it out as you go! Be confident in the fact that you can make a change.”

– Fiona Lu, *What We All Deserve*





“When it comes to topics that are very important to you, you may face more backlash than you thought. When it comes to areas where you have lived experience, facing that kind of backlash exacerbates it. But, I do think that even though it is hard, advocacy is one of the most empowering things I’ve ever done, and I do think that you have to rely on the community around you, the people who truly support you. Despite the challenges, in my opinion, it’s been worth every second.”

– Kaylyn Ahn, *Northwestern University*

youth to service initiatives?

“Youth are tapped into and aware of the societal and global challenges that we all are facing. Perhaps as a consequence of this heightened awareness, youth can easily become apathetic in the face of these challenges. This is understandable, given that many of these issues (like climate change) are complex, and it’s nearly impossible to feel like you, as an individual, can create tangible impact on such a far-reaching, global issue. However, I feel that this couldn’t be farther from the truth. I’ve seen first-hand the impacts that young people can have on big issues. We can create change, and many youth are already leading the charge to build a better future. So, we need to encourage each other, share knowledge, and just remind ourselves that we should stay optimistic and keep pushing forward, even when it seems to be an increasingly uphill climb.”



– Alex Quian, *United by Serving*

Join the Conversation!

Engaging in service spans from everyday acts of kindness to volunteering time to advocacy initiatives. Service can also be artistic and creative! Young people are leading service through community advocacy in a variety of ways. By making sure everyone's voices are heard, these young leaders aren't waiting for tomorrow; they're pushing us toward a better future, starting now. Check out these powerful spoken word pieces written and performed by associate editors of this publication and consider how you might leverage artistic expression as a means for engaging in service.

Black History Month Spoken Word by **Trey Baker**

“For me, spoken word poetry is part of my acts of service because it’s one of the most sacred art forms we have for its linguistic diversity that powerfully captures the beauty of expression, inspires meaningful dialogue, and enriches our conscience to move social progress forward. This spoken word piece is an original poem that I wrote and performed for the Chicago Bulls halftime show to celebrate Black History Month and honor the legacy of Black Americans in our love for community and culture, our momentous struggle for freedom, and the hope we possess to continue impacting change.”

– **Trey Baker**, *Scholastic Corporation*

What Do Criminals Look Like? by **Fatimata Cham**

“I identify as a human rights activist, spoken word poet, and founder of Climate 4 Sisterhood. I always tell people that activism was not a choice for me, it was a form of survival. It was my way of showing up for my community and ensuring my community’s voices were being amplified and heard. My mother grew up in the Gambia and never attended school. In my predominantly Gambian and Senegalese community, there was a lot of gender discrimination, and I was motivated by my mother’s story to get into advocacy and work towards these issues. More specifically, I began my work in gender advocacy and climate advocacy at an early age. I would write letters to elected officials, then later joined organizations like Girl Up as a teen advisor, advocated for legislation on Capitol Hill, and began writing my poetry at the same time.”

– **Fatimata Cham**, *Climate 4 Sisterhood*



Reflect & Reconnect

- How are our youngest youth (under age 12) invited into service and recognized for their potential for deep influence?
- In what ways does seeing examples of service led by young people inspire other youth to pursue their own service journeys?
- What insights have you gained on your service journey that you would share with other emerging service leaders?



2 Broadening Access: Expanding Pathways for Youth to Serve

For young people, participation in service is often a function of access to opportunities and juggling competing priorities and needs. We wanted to learn more about this directly from youth leading service initiatives. We video chatted with two young people to discuss barriers to participation in service along with practices that limit acts of service from reaching their fullest impact. Check out the interview below for insights from brilliant insiders addressing these issues and advocating for solutions in their service work!



I was always questioning, “Why are things like this? Do they have to be like this? Why aren’t more people doing things about this? Can I do something about this?” I didn’t want to wait until I got older. From a very young age, I saw a gap, and instead of waiting on the right resources, I wanted to become one.

– **Jilkiah Bryant**, *Project Powerful*

Youth Leading Service: An Interview on Barriers & Representation

Editors: Hi Jilkiah and Hannah! Thanks for joining us in the conversation around barriers and access to service opportunities for youth. Could you introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about the work that you do?

Hannah: Sure! I'm Hannah Botts, and I use they/she pronouns. I am a junior at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, which is a little town no one's ever heard of unless they're from the state. I've been heavily involved for the past couple years with the Student Basic Needs Coalition, which is a youth-led nonprofit network. We seek to end student hunger and homelessness primarily by grassroots distribution of our simplified SNAP screener as well as advocacy and legislative work.

Jilkiah: My name is Jilkiah Bryant, and I'm an Evaluation Associate at the Center for Research and Evaluation, where I serve on the Children, Families, and Communities team. All around the world, individuals and organizations work hard to achieve positive change. In my portfolio, we help support local, state, and national organizations to collect, interpret, and use evidence about their work to maximize their impact. I am also the founder and executive director of Project Powerful Incorporated, which I started in 2017 when I was in high school.

Editors: We are so grateful to learn from you both. I'd love to hear a bit more about how each of you got into service.

Hannah: I got started in service with the Sunrise Movement, like the environmental sort of crowd around Greta Thunberg back when people didn't know who Greta Thunberg was. That was when I really got involved with youth movements in general. Prior to that, I hadn't seen a lot of young people actually get A) recognition, B) institutional power, and C) respect for the work that they did, which I think opened up the opportunity for me to jump into my work.

From there, I was involved with the Kentucky Student Voice Team, which is a state-based advocacy organization. I was a research fellow there when I studied the disparities in qualities of care that marginalized students received from their counselors during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in Appalachia. The results were not good, but that was what led to my interest in research as a catalyst for change. I was also a research fellow with 18by Vote, where we studied youth-specific engagement and youth attitudes on civic engagement. I focused on youth in rural communities, which is usually a blind spot in research talking about civic engagement. Young people's lived experiences and stories are very rarely listened to, and I believe research can be a route to voicing their life experiences.

Jilkiah: To give a little background, I grew up in a predominantly black small town called Macon, Mississippi with a population of only 2,479 people. My hometown is a hub of beautiful landscapes, historical sites, and sporting activities, but it is also a place of generational poverty and a food desert. At 44.6%, nearly half of our population lives below the poverty line.

Growing up, I lacked a substantial understanding of the world beyond my community. But, when I went to the Mississippi School for Mathematics Science, I recognized that the disparities that I witnessed in Macon were not isolated. Communities across the state were facing similar challenges like inadequate access to quality health care, quality education, and basic necessities.

For a while, I didn't really know if I could do anything about it. Waiting for others to act became exhausting, and I knew I couldn't postpone action until later in life. I grew sick and tired of waiting for someone to come save me and give me all the answers. I felt an internal calling to do more. So, I made a choice to take charge and just really started figuring out ways to best serve the people that I saw were being overlooked. I knew that the people in my community and others like it needed it.

Broadening Access: Expanding Pathways for Youth to Serve

Editors: Wow! What inspiring journeys. Thank you both for sharing. You two have been busy! Can you share how you've seen access and representation affect the impact of service and service engagement amongst your peers?

Jilkiah: I think it is very hard to get people to care about other people when they can only see the problems that are in front of them. And what I mean by that is it's hard to interact with the external world when your internal world is not safe and is not allowing you to meet your basic needs: to eat, to live, to have a place to stay. I think that is one of the most important things: human beings have to have their basic needs met. And, we see all across the country and all across the world that a lot of people are not getting their basic needs met.

In regards to impact, I think there is a disconnect in recognizing that all of our stories, all of our service and our work – no matter what we choose to do directly or indirectly – impact communities, individuals and their stories. Understanding that basic truth, we can begin to center and cater the needs and the responses of our organizations and industries to our people as it was designed. There is an implementation gap after the design stage. There is a disconnect happening between intent and impact, what that impact should mean, how that impact should be measured, and how much it should influence the way that we alter and look at the things in our control based on individual action and choice.

Hannah: Yeah, for me, during COVID-19, for a long period of time I needed a hotspot because I didn't have service. It was very spotty where I was living, and that was something that prevented me from doing any work whatsoever. It's just those little things. I've spoken to so many young people who've had very similar experiences, especially those who are living in rural communities or Appalachia. It can literally just be a \$500 purchase one time and that's what can make or break a young person's involvement in an organization in its entirety. So, that's why I think that leveraging the capital of organizations and institutions is most important.

All of the advocacy work that I've done, I have learned almost entirely from peers because I come from a more rural environment that was generally under-resourced. Most of the organizing and mobilization work that I've done has been remote because there just isn't the infrastructure in the region that I call home. Quite frankly, organizations, nonprofits, foundations... their benefit to young leaders is the fact that they have this institutional power, money, and

resources. In a lot of cases, they choose not to use their power, yet still use the young people's words and expertise despite providing little to no financial compensation for their contributions. This can lead to a gap where young people who have the privilege to not have to depend on work for wages are overrepresented. This is obviously not a blanket statement, but I do feel like in a lot of youth-led movements, the people who can sacrifice the most time tend to be the ones who are the most well resourced, which leads to youth who have fewer intersections of marginalization and who have fewer barriers to service being the ones who are the most rewarded for work.

Editors: So what would be your suggestion to address this gap and the varied needs of youth today? And what would service look like with those solutions?

Jilkiah: The first step is being able to recognize and be honest in the wrongs of our history and our current society. And, not just the recognition of it, but the calling of action to do something about the conditions that were created by design. These conditions contribute to the structural violence that is happening in our systems and work against people and communities. We need to create tangible pathways for establishing a societal culture of justice, of change, and of wanting people to live a life of happiness, good health, and financial security. How do we generate not just equality, but equity in this pursuit and in accessing essential rights? I think service in response to addressing those issues should meet basic needs, center communities and impact, enhance peoples' quality of life, and lead to a culture of justice, change, and innovation.

Hannah: Building off what Jilkiah shared, I think tactically organizations should do the work to figure out what the barriers of access are to their organization and what their organizations are currently doing. And, understand that just because young people are young, that doesn't mean that they're in some way underqualified, so compensate them accordingly. And, I think that, through that, the average organizer would be a lot more diverse. We would be able to hear from folks who we haven't really been able to hear from. If we were intentional about our approach to service and youth voice, we could create environments where young people feel like they are not only respected, but encouraged and are able to grow their personal and professional networks through the service and advocacy work that they do.

Editors: Thank you both, again, for your time and expertise!



Reflect & Reconnect

- How might the design and delivery of a service experience affect the ability of a diverse set of people to both lead and participate?
- How might providing compensation, transportation, or technology help support youth participation in service? What holds us back from offsetting the costs to participate in service and how might this contribute to inequity?
- How does your organization engage with service while ensuring basic needs are met for all those involved?



3 Intentional Mentorship: Cultivating Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

So much of youth engagement in service is born out of mentoring relationships. Previous sections highlighted just how powerful youth are in supporting one another's journeys, but so are adults, organizations, and community constituents. Don't forget that as youth, we may simultaneously serve as mentors and mentees.

Whether you're currently a mentor or seeking to help others in their service journey, what better way to hear about what youth are looking for in mentorships than from youth themselves? With shared knowledge and relationships being crucial aspects of service work, we asked our associate editors to reflect on best practices in fostering growth and development for both mentors and mentees to ultimately move the needle in the landscape of service.

Call & Response: Mentoring Matters!

How has mentorship influenced your journey?

“So many adult mentors have helped in my journey. One of my adult mentors helped us workshop our original organizational proposal and she recently commented on a post about a bill that we proposed this year. And, it was just a real full circle moment because the organization she works at is supporting a bill that originated out of a youth organization that she basically helped mold indirectly because she helped us look over our preliminary materials.

I also think in terms of adults who may have never worked in youth spaces, and I believe it’s really just about being open to our ideas. I’ve faced environments where young people aren’t always credited for their service work. You would think that they would leave space for youth to speak, but not always. I think it’s about mentors just giving us space and trying to highlight our contributions whenever possible, because it’s so hard for us to get a sense of legitimacy in something as bureaucratic and established as policy-making.”

– **Fiona Lu**, *What We All Deserve*

“Adults have significant power in helping youth get the opportunities to show that they’re more than the worst things that have happened to them. When youth don’t have the resources, when they don’t have the support, it’s up to adults to provide that for us. I’ve been so lucky to be able to be where I am right now. I think a lot of people who were in similar situations as me, but didn’t have the privilege to do the same things I did, are funneled into poverty, into not being able to get an education, into incarceration even. I think the reason I was able to get out of such a dark place is because of advocacy. It was because of the adult mentors in my life.”

– **Kaylyn Ahn**, *Northwestern University*

What are recommendations for youth looking to identify mentors in their community?

“I start with the core of a community which, for me, is the educational system and schools. I would encourage any young person looking for a mentor, or trying to seek out who that may be, to first write down who that person should be for you. Doing this can help you start understanding what your idea of a mentor is and what that looks like for you.

Then, in that self-reflection, ask those questions to a teacher, ask those questions to the different activity leaders within your community, whether it be your local government, in your school, or in student groups. Get involved and believe in yourself, so that others can hear your story. And that translates into others believing in your story. Put that out there to the different sectors of your community to really appreciate how they can help you achieve what you’re aiming to achieve.”

– **Trey Baker**, *Scholastic Corporation*

“In my time with the Youth Technology Corps, we’ve intentionally worked to empower youth to serve both as mentors and mentees while leaning into the power of community. With our summer camps, we work with students as young as fifth grade. They have been able to get through lessons with their parents, older siblings, or friends and collaborate to build amazing projects. All of this is mentoring! I see their older siblings exercising leadership with help from their younger siblings and both of them taking initiative when figuring out solutions. By focusing on youth and including their loved ones, we’re investing in people who are excited about long-term, collaborative solutions. It’s been inspiring to see their network and communities engaged in the shared service of familial and intergenerational mentoring.”

– **Juan Zarco**, *Youth Technology Corps*



Interested in serving as a mentor?
Here are five qualities seen in great mentors!

And, what should youth expect from working with mentors?

“Adult mentors can be critical to a young person’s success, especially those navigating challenging paths like creating a service project or a nonprofit organization. Adults have the opportunity to play constructive and supportive roles for youth, but adults should consider how they can guide youth without having them conform to conventional norms around how social impact work “should” be done. I think that in many issue areas, generations Z and Alpha are taking novel approaches to drive change and we should be allowed to do that. Big problems sometimes require new solutions. Mentors should do their best to apply their input and insights into these new frameworks without encouraging youth to rely on more traditional molds for creating impact.”

– **Alex Quian**, *United by Serving*

“From the perspective of a mentor, be who you needed when you were their age. So many professionals want the folks who come after them to go through the same hurdles that they did, and I think that we need to hang that up. I have to recognize that at some point I’m going to have to get out of the way and accept that I may not need to be the loudest voice at the table. My opinion doesn’t have to matter anymore, and I’m okay with that because I’m satisfied with the work that I’ve done. AND, the work continues, so I believe people should connect themselves to the work and not the role. If we are wanting to leave things better than they were, we ought to be intentional in developing those around us, and that only goes into true effect when we know and have a belief that the folks who come after us can and should do better than us.”

– **Antonio Scott**, *African American Mayors Association*



THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP IN ACTION

by Cherie Animashaun, Her Rising Initiative

I started Her Rising Initiative because I saw, especially during COVID, a lot of discrepancies and disparities being further highlighted. Especially when it came to women. I saw a lot of young girls struggling with their mental health, so I wanted to create an organization that spoke to those girls because they were falling through the cracks. Our goal is to uplift women and youth around the world. We do this through different programming, such as conferences and fundraisers and we heavily focus on mentorship.

For example, Girls Who Lead is one of our biggest events. It’s a statewide event where we have up to 200 middle school girls from across Illinois join free, hands-on workshops covering topics from STEM to screenwriting. We also bring in different speakers of color. And, I think the representation really helps girls to feel motivated to serve because I know for a lot of people, if you don’t see the different versions of service and the different ways you can use your career to serve people, then it’s hard to envision.

We’ve brought in a Senator Tammy Duckworth, chefs from Food Network and even pageant representatives. The participants see these diverse women in leadership that have upward mobility, but they’re still giving back, all in different ways. And then I also share my own story, so they see how someone who’s not that far apart from their age, is engaging in service as well. I think that helps them see that you don’t need to be 25 or 30 to help your community. We also focus heavily on service and how they’re going to step out into their world and enact change.





Reflect & Reconnect

- How do you build mentor and mentee relationships with everyone involved in service through your organization?
- How can you ensure that adult mentoring doesn't shift into unhealthy power dynamics that rob youth of their agency or are just performative gestures?
- How do you ensure diverse representation of mentor identities so youth see themselves in service?

4 **Community Connections:** **Forging Change that Endures**

Embracing collaboration with community members is about elevating the stories of those directly influenced by the issues we are working to alleviate, making sure solutions match what our neighborhoods and communities really need, and boosting the confidence of those already doing the work.

By spotlighting those closest to the action, we don't just fix things for now; we set up long-term solutions. When we get local leaders and community members of all ages in on the action, our projects become a vital part of the ongoing journey towards making things better. Collaboration is what keeps our service real, impactful, and firmly planted in the heart of our community.



Collaboration Catalyst: Mobilizing for Collective Progress

by Sky Harper, *Drexel University*

I grew up in a traditional household, where my culture was the foundation for my upbringing. My parents instilled traditional teachings and values, many of which encompass integrity, civility, and consensus. We learned about our relationship with Mother Earth and to respect one another. There was a strong emphasis on truth and selflessness and my mom wanted me to grow up respectful, fearless, and humble.

Upon reflection, I see these teachings were foundational to my understanding of life. When my family attended ceremonies, I demonstrated these values around relatives by helping in any way that I could. Care for community was always part of how we navigated the world.

In high school I worked to bring my community together to improve living standards. I knew and greeted many of our neighbors as shimasaani (my grandmother), shicheii (my grandfather), and shik'e (my family), and I was tired of seeing their daily struggles. Many had grown up and lived their entire lives without modern amenities and many had left the world without ever seeing electricity in their homes or running water. It was time to get together, time to unite as a family, time to create a change.

As a unit, we were able to create a petition and draft resolutions; one for running potable water, electricity, and road maintenance. We presented these resolutions to the chapter house, and each member spoke on the issue. I listened as many elders recounted their past and how they currently live. When I finally spoke, I spoke about my hopes for the future, my dreams for my community, and my appreciation for my united family. The resolutions were passed and to this day, we have seen renovations and development. Power lines have been extended and water line projects are underway. I am glad that I was able to have a direct hand in this progress.

These same lessons influenced how I engage in college as well. During my freshman year, I discovered there

were no organizations nor resources for Native American and Indigenous students. I made it my goal to find other students who identified as Native American or Indigenous, which was not easy, as I learned there were less than seven undergraduates on campus. We worked together to create Drexel Indigenous Students of the Americas (DISA). I am proud to be the first Indigenous student organization on campus, but it's bittersweet that it took so long.

Our organization's original mission was to foster a social community, but we felt immediately pushed into a role of Indigenous representation, awareness, and advocacy. As a new organization, we had no funding or resources, yet we were strongly encouraged to hold several high-visibility events. With no support, we hosted the first Indigenous People's Day celebration on campus, created programming for Native American Heritage month, and established land acknowledgment plaques on campus for the Lenape people.

Despite facing challenges in securing resources from our institution, our efforts were highlighted in publications and progress reports focused on diversity and equity. This exposure, although well intended, left us feeling somewhat exploited and seemed to overshadow our original community-driven goals. This led to a sense of disconnect and a perception of diminished autonomy in our initiatives.

Gradually, we contacted leaders of other BIPOC organizations and realized a collaboration could work in our favor. We also reached out beyond the BIPOC student community to other identity-based organizations. At first, I was hesitant to reach out because it seemed like a double-edged sword; our collective voices would be amplified, but DISA's comparatively small voice might also be lost in the group and muted among other identities. Native American and Indigenous populations are a minority among minorities, often still forgotten in discussions. Even with this fear, I knew that coming together and reaching a consensus was necessary.

After conferring with leaders of other identity-based student groups, we created the Coalition of Identity-Based Organizations (CIBO). This coalition represented all underrepresented student populations, and as founding members, we used this as a conduit for change. As we struggled to promote diversity and visibility, we sought transparency from the administration, direct and effective communication, and more robust support in exchange for our hard work on shared initiatives.

Ultimately, we provoked a collective awakening. Together, we found community, sharing personal accounts of our struggles, and as a coalition (CIBO), we drafted a petition that laid out our issues and made recommendations for institutional changes. We sent the petition to the administration and had conversations about change, and continue to do so. DISA's birth has had a ripple effect on campus. Throughout this process, I've made it my mission to ensure that Indigenous students are represented in every stage of decision-making.

In my future as an advocate for Native American and Indigenous communities and leader of service initiatives, I know I will encounter similar challenges on a greater scale. My life experiences so far have taught me something important about the nature of consensus: building a large, diverse coalition to address an issue can be risky, and there is a chance of further marginalization. However, the risk comes with an opportunity to amplify our voices to reach a shared goal. Collaboration is not always smooth. Building and sustaining a community is not easy. However, even if different groups or communities have different needs, we can still rely on each other and couple our energies to be heard.

Sky Harper is a first-generation student and the eldest of six boys from the Navajo Nation. Sky is also the founder and president of Drexel Indigenous Students of the Americas (the first Native American serving group on campus) and an avid DEI advocate in his community.

Centering the Importance of Community in Service

“A world that empowers me to serve is one that decenters individualism and values and upholds collectivism. One that is not rooted in power and success but rather values. Rest is resistance and I think a world that understands that we do not have to be working all the time to be valuable is important. Service to me is taking care of yourself just as much as you take care of other people. Service to me means community.”

– **Fatimata Cham**, *Climate 4 Sisterhood*



“I believe that the people who are most affected by problems should be a part of the solution. When it comes to service, there are a lot of philanthropic organizations that are run by people who might be studying issues, but aren’t attached to them. Their lives are not directly affected by the issues in the same way as frontline workers and activists.”

For example, I do a lot with gun violence prevention, and the knowledge around gun violence is very well-understood by the people where I’m from in Chicago who are affected by homicides every single day. I would just love it if the people who were affected by gun violence could have a part and serve and work towards solutions. If there were no limits or bounds, I feel like the people who are the most hurt and marginalized in those spaces would be able to fully serve and also receive the service that they need.”

– **Cherie Animashaun**, *Her Rising Initiative*



Reflect & Reconnect

- How are you involving the affected community in the co-creation of your program or service experience?
- How are you bringing youth into the process of planning and delivering the service experience so that it is responsive to community needs?
- What does reciprocity look like in your change strategies when engaging in service initiatives?



Tying It All Together:

Service Visionaries Shaping Tomorrow's Landscape

Freedom dreaming is a framework and a tool that asks us to not only acknowledge where we've been and where we are, but where we want to go. "Freedom dreaming is an opportunity to visualize the future we want to live in, and harness the necessary tools and resources to actively move that dream toward a reality" ([CUNY, n.d.](#)).

The concept is an invitation to aspire to and purposefully act to create a more equitable world. Importantly, freedom dreaming acknowledges that, "without new visions we don't know what to build, only what to knock down" (Kelley, 2022, p. xii).

This publication opened with Trey Baker's invocation to engage in freedom dreaming that expands the boundaries of how we understand service. This is precisely the type of visioning that we hoped our team of associate editors would engage with to envision a world that empowers all youth to serve and asks them to share what that world would look like. Let's close, then, by exploring what some of those dreams look like. We hope this offers you both inspiration to see the world not just as it is but how it could be as well as aspirations to be part of co-creating this new world.

Tying It All Together:

Service Visionaries Shaping Tomorrow's Landscape

🗨️ In an ideal world, youth would have the resources to advocate. I strongly believe it's a privilege to be able to advocate, because most survivors don't survive. Most survivors are funneled into this pipeline of poverty and so much pain. I've had the resources through my university and through the teachers around me, who have enabled me to do things like go to therapy, go to trauma recovery programs, to go to conferences. For every one person, every one survivor that is able to advocate, there are thousands of survivors who are still suffering to even make ends meet. I think in an ideal world, every person who has experienced what I've experienced would be able to have the opportunity to share their story and be at the forefront of this movement."

– Kaylyn Ahn, *Northwestern University*



Join the Conversation!

Want to learn more about freedom dreaming?
Check out this [interactive site](#) to join the conversation!

“ One of the things that I would love to see is how we are empowering people to stay resilient. You know, I do this work voluntarily, so all my work has been volunteering. And that’s such a privilege to say that, but a lot of people cannot say that. Honestly, it’s becoming increasingly difficult to stay a volunteer. So how are we, the world, coming together to really empower people who are making the difference and making sure that they can still do this work without having to worry about how they’re paying their bills or paying for their daily needs. I think, in a dream world, we would be empowering activists with the resources that they need to create the impact and create the change that they want in the world.”


– **Kevin Patel**, *OneUpAction*

“ I think if there were no bounds to service and we lived in a perfect world, I think service would be a career option or a life option. It wouldn’t have to be something you do on the side. I wish you could also engage in service during your corporate work. I wish it didn’t have to be like a side venture that you cram into a weekend or something you have to do after work. I wish service could be intertwined with work and integrated into the job market.”

– **Cherie Animashaun**, *Her Rising Initiative*

Tying It All Together:

Service Visionaries Shaping Tomorrow's Landscape

 I think it all goes back to adults not counting students out. Sometimes, there are a lot of barriers *for* young people and a lot of doubts *about* young people. I think that a world that empowers youth to serve would look like adults really trusting young people.

Of course, adults worked very hard to be at this point in their careers or their education, but I envision a culture where you don't discount someone. Instead I hope adults can be open and willing to say "it's not perfect and we need to try to fix it to help young people." That is empowering to hear and can lead to greater access and opportunities for youth. We need the resources and support so a student can confidently say, "I'm gonna take up this new opportunity. I'm gonna jump into this new role and really feel confident and really grow into it."

– **Diego Victoria**, *Associated Students of Irvine Valley College*



Join the Conversation!

Want to teach others about freedom dreaming?
View an example lesson plan [here](#).

☞☞ If society truly wants to empower and enable youth to serve, it needs to reduce barriers to resources and create more accessible opportunities for youth to serve or build their own service initiatives. It would be great to see more funders have initiatives specifically focused on supporting youth and new organizations. There should be ways for youth (without a proven track record) to find funding for their ideas, beyond just a handful of startup competitions or fellowship programs.

For youth who don't necessarily want to create their own service, they need to be able to easily find ways to volunteer. Crucially, youth need to be able to find ways that they can leverage their passions and skills to make a difference. I think one reason youth may not be enthusiastic about volunteering is that they've never been exposed to service opportunities that align with what they care about. Ideally, youth would have access to resources, professional development, and service opportunities through environments they're already in, particularly schools. This would make these assets most accessible to youth, while also making them more approachable because they would be presented in a context that youth are already familiar and comfortable with."

– Alex Quian, *United by Serving*



“ In Our Own Voices

“It’s important to work alongside communities to be in the long-term fight for policies, and the sustainable multi-year movement to change these principles that we’ve deemed are important. What’s so appealing about young people being involved in and leading the movement is that we, because we’re younger, see things as a multi-year effort and we’re committed to staying.”

– Fiona Lu, What We All Deserve

Call to Action

The preceding pages call for a world in which youth-led, youth-driven service is the rule, rather than the exception; a world in which service opportunities are accessible, mentorship is available, and community engagement is sustainable. And if it were up to the imaginations of young people—or at least, of the young people featured in this report—participation in service would be a given, rather than a luxury available to only those with the resources to pursue it.

When it comes to changing the world—or, more specifically, the world's approach to youth service—we find it important to acknowledge that imagining is only half of the work. The rest of the work lies in the doing, in the steps we take that bring us from the present to our imagined future, and in the identification of our role in making that future a reality.

As much as we would like to, we cannot tell you the role you will play in our collective efforts to transform youth service. That is entirely up to you. We can, however, encourage you to think critically and intentionally about the experiences you bring, the positions you occupy, and the privileges you have, as you make your decision. We can hope that this report will have helped you along the way.

If you're a young person who has engaged, or has wanted to engage, in service: We hope that this report has made you feel seen in the work that you do. We

encourage you to continue serving your community in ways that matter to you and to remain flexible in your thinking about service—what it looks like, what it means, and what it means to do it well—as you engage with peers and adult mentors in your community.

If you're an adult who has worked, or has wanted to work, with young people: We hope that this report has helped you to see the work that still needs to be done. We encourage you to sit with the perspectives brought forth by the young people featured in this report and prioritize youth-led, youth-driven service by committing to uplifting access and providing mentorship to young people.

If you're a person who remembers what it was like to be young and driven to make a difference in your community: We hope that this report has helped you to see that you still can.

We encourage you, whoever and wherever you are, to keep asking questions, starting conversations, and imagining ways to make your community and our world a better place.





In our own voices:

youth perspectives on community service



Tiana Day
Abrianna Morales

About the Editors

Tiana Day

Youth Advocates for Change

Tiana Day is a 21-year old activist, social entrepreneur and founder of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Youth Advocates for Change. Her Los Angeles based organization has served over 700 students across the globe aiming to provide youth with innovative and engaging platforms to bridge art and activism through journalism, film, photography, fashion, and community projects. Tiana has a passion for equitable and accessible education, independently raising over \$30,000 for a scholarship fund dedicated to supporting Black students' educational pursuits. Tiana focuses on fostering diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), sustainability, and social impact. She has provided consultation and spoken at various K-12 schools, universities, and Fortune 500 companies on matters of Gen-Z advocacy, values, and DEI.

Abrianna Morales

National Organization for Victim Advocacy

Abrianna Morales, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a sexual assault survivor, victim advocate, and activist. After being sexually assaulted at the age of fifteen and facing the social, emotional, and legal turmoil of sexual victimization, she created Sexual Assault Youth Support Network (SAYSN) in 2017 to support, empower, and connect young survivors like herself. Since then, Abrianna's dedication to victim advocacy has grown into a passion for uniting research, practice, and policy in service of sexual violence survivors, ultimately seeking to elevate their voices in communities, legislatures, and the academic discourse. As a McNair and Truman Scholar, she has also worked to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victims' experiences of procedural justice in the criminal-legal system, as well as children's abilities to comprehend and identify grooming behaviors. In 2023, she graduated from the University of New Mexico with a Bachelors of Science in Psychology and Criminology. As NOVA's Victim Advocacy Corps Program Manager, Abrianna works with youth advocates, students, researchers, and institutions of higher education to empower youth from historically marginalized communities to explore careers in victim services.

About the Associate Editors

Kaylyn Ahn

Northwestern University

Kaylyn Ahn is a junior at Northwestern studying Social Policy and Legal Studies. She is incredibly passionate about women's rights, stemming from her own experiences as a survivor of violence. She is the co-president of the Undergraduate Prison Education Partnership, a 2022 DeBarry Civic Scholar, was listed as a GLAAD 20 Under 20 Young LGBTQ+ Activists in 2021, was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, and worked at the US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights. She has spoken across the country about her experiences as a survivor of domestic and sexual violence, and testified in front of Illinois Congress to help unanimously pass a bill to close a legal loophole in Illinois sexual assault law.

Cherie Animashaun

Her Rising Initiative

Cherie Animashaun is an author, community organizer, and CEO. She is studying Public Policy at Cornell University. In October 2021, she founded Her Rising Initiative, a non-profit dedicated to empowering youth and women across every horizon. The array of events, fundraisers, and advocacy work has garnered coverage from The Washington Post and ABC News. Cherie is passionate about creating safe spaces for youth whether that be through legislation, nonprofit work, or writing.

Trey Baker

Scholastic Corporation

Trey Baker is a 2x Emmy nominated and award-winning spoken word artist. Trey has performed for and been awarded by President Obama for his youth activism and leadership in storytelling. He also serves as the Special Advisor to the Obama Foundation's My Brother's Keeper Alliance and MBK Chicago Action Team. Recently, Trey has partnered with Scholastic Publishing Company to be the next Rising Voices mentor and author for his upcoming children's book and Rising Voices collection featuring the African Diaspora. Trey is currently a junior at DePaul University where he is majoring in Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies.

Hannah Botts

Student Basic Needs Coalition

Hannah Botts (they/she) is a youth researcher and advocate with more than four years of experience leading organizing and issue-based advocacy, both nationally and in her home state of Kentucky. She currently serves as the Director of Partnerships at the Student Basic Needs Coalition, and has previously initiated studies on youth civic engagement and educational equity through 18by Vote and the Kentucky Student Voice Team. When she isn't leading youth movements, she can be found hiking, reading, or in the glassblowing studio.

Jilkiah Bryant

Project Powerful

Jilkiah Bryant, a native of Macon, MS, graduated from the University of Mississippi with a B.S. in Public Health and Health Sciences, specializing in community health with a minor in mathematics. During her time at the university, she was recognized with numerous accolades, such as being named a 2022 Harry S. Truman Scholar and inducted into her university's Hall of Fame. Throughout her academic tenure, Bryant championed causes close to her heart, tackling issues like the Black male educator shortage through her honors thesis and establishing the annual bilingual health fair in Pontotoc, MS in 2021. She incorporated her non-profit in 2019, entitled Project Powerful, that addresses violence, food, literacy, and education challenges through youth empowerment and community engagement strategies in locations around Mississippi. Currently, she works as an Evaluation Associate at CERÉ, supporting health and education clients in her portfolio to achieve their program goals. With extensive research experience, Jilkiah combines data analytics, research, and engagement to impact disadvantaged communities. This past year, she was chosen as a 2024 Marshall Scholar. In the fall, Jilkiah will begin her studies in the UK where she will study International Development at the University of Sheffield, and Health Economics at the London School of Economics. With a fervent dedication to equity and empowerment, she envisions a future where her expertise and passion converge to uplift those marginalized and overlooked in her beloved home state of Mississippi and beyond.

Fatimata Cham

Climate 4 Sisterhood

A published poet and human rights advocate, Fatimata Cham is originally from the Bronx, New York. She is 22 years old and a first-generation Gambian college graduate. She majored in Government and Law and Women and Gender studies at Lafayette College. In her time at Lafayette, she was the 2023 George Wharton Pepper Prize winner and 2023 Lafayette College commencement speaker. She was a member of various clubs and initiatives on campus that work towards building an equitable and inclusive environment for all students. She is also a 2022 Truman Scholar, 2019 Coca-Cola scholar, founder of Climate 4 Sisterhood and former Girl Up teen advisor to the United Nations Foundation. Fatimata is passionate about advocating for her community and does so through her writing and frontline community work. In high school Fatimata published a short book of poetry, *Perfectly Imperfect*. She uses the intersection between poetry and activism to talk about issues related to environmental injustice, gender inequity, racism, Islamophobia, and a plethora of issues she is passionate about. Recently, She was cast in *Dear...* season 2 on Apple TV alongside Malala Yousfzai to talk about her climate activism work. She hopes to build a more just and equitable world through her work and uplifting those around her.

Sky Harper

Drexel University

Sky Harper is a first-generation student, pursuing a BS in chemistry (biochemistry concentration), with a biology and interdisciplinary problem-solving minor, as well as being in the honors program and on the pre-med track at Drexel University. He is the eldest of six boys and comes from the Navajo Nation. His aim is to use research to minimize health disparities in low-resource communities and improve Indigenous public health. He is also the founder and president of Drexel Indigenous Students of the Americas (the first Native American serving group on campus) and an avid DEI advocate in his community. He is the current National Junior Student Representative and active Sequoyah member of AISES, an American Indian College Fund Student Ambassador, and a Barry Goldwater, Udall Foundation, Cobell Scholar, and Harry S. Truman Scholar.

Fiona Lu

What We All Deserve

Fiona Lu (she/her) is a first-year at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) studying Public Affairs and Labor Studies. Her hometown is in Orange County, California. Fiona is passionate about public policy that addresses issues in education, child care, public assistance, and labor. Throughout her journey as a student advocate, she has worked on multiple California state bills that have addressed inequities within the state education system and social welfare programs. Some policy initiatives she's passionate about include building strong public schools, attending to the needs of impoverished women, youth, and families, expanding mentorship services, and promoting higher education accessibility. Currently, she leads a youth organization that addresses anti-poverty through state policymaking, called *What We All Deserve*. Much of her advocacy work focuses on how to get younger voices meaningfully involved with the policymaking process by breaking down institutional barriers and promoting intergenerational collaboration.

Kevin Patel

OneUpAction

Kevin J. Patel is a passionate and distinguished climate justice leader and social entrepreneur based in Los Angeles, California, with over a decade of experience advocating for a sustainable and equitable world. He envisions a future where young people can access the resources they need to implement climate solutions and combat environmental injustice. Patel is widely recognized for his pioneering work in establishing the Youth Climate Commission, which he passed in 2019. As the architect of this initiative, Patel has enabled youth voices to be heard more effectively in addressing the climate crisis. In 2022, Patel was appointed to the Youth Climate Commission as a Commissioner. In addition, he is the founder and Executive Director of OneUpAction International, a non-profit organization that supports and empowers young people to implement and accelerate climate solutions in their communities. Patel's commitment to sustainability has earned him numerous accolades and ambassadorships. He serves as a UN Togetherband Ambassador for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 7, 13, and 14 and was named a 2020 National Geographic Young Explorer. He is also a member of several influential organizations, including the LA28 Next Gen Council, The Environmental Media Association Activist Board, the World Economic Forum's 1t.org US Stakeholder Council, the Ingka Young Leaders Forum, Youthtopia World: Circle of Youth, the Climate Power Council, and many more. Patel's exceptional achievements have been widely recognized, and he has been awarded the *MensHealth 20 Under 20* in 2020 and the *2021 NowThis News Sustainability Honoree*. Kevin recently received his undergraduate degree in Political Science at Loyola Marymount University. Patel remains committed to his mission of creating a sustainable and equitable world for all.

Alex Quian

United by Serving

Alex Quian is the founder of the United by Serving, a nonprofit that unifies communities and builds connections through the transformative power of service. United by Serving provides youth with the training, resources, and platform to lead service projects that allow them to create impact and learn valuable skills. A few years ago, Alex would never have imagined that he would spend so much of his time serving the community, let alone leading a nonprofit. That all changed in summer 2019 when a mentor challenged him to complete 30 service projects in 30 days. Despite his initial hesitation, Alex took on this challenge and started a life-changing journey of service. Since completing the challenge, Alex has started a number of initiatives to provide youth with personal and professional development opportunities, including creating a scholarship, podcast, and dozens of service projects. Wanting to encourage other people to serve the community, in 2021, Alex published a book about his experiences. The book, *Better Together: How 30 Days of Service Changed My Life*, shares lessons he learned throughout his nonprofit journey.

Antonio Scott

African American Mayors Association

Antonio D. Scott is a mission-driven organizational strategist. Merging a unique balance of diplomacy and grace, Antonio is an experienced people leader with training in higher education administration, able to develop and sustain deep relationships with high-stakes principals and their teams. Having served as Chief of Staff at both the African American Mayors Association and the National Bankers Association, Antonio's commitment to serving minority communities is rooted in his experience of curating revenue generating high-impact programs and mutually beneficial strategic partnerships. A proven workplace community builder and energizer of multigenerational teams, Antonio's relationship-centered collaborative nature is grounded in solution-oriented problem solving. Whether through means of public engagement, public policy, or public relations, Antonio is deeply passionate about enacting positive social change for underserved populations.

Diego Victoria

Associated Students of Irvine Valley College

Diego Victoria is a second-year community college student and will be transferring to a four-year university in Fall 2024. He is a political science major who has interned for state and federal legislative offices in his community. He is a first-generation American and college student who takes pride in representing his community by advocating for their educational needs in student government.

Juan Zarco

Youth Technology Corps

Juan embarked on his journey in technology and community service by signing under a "maybe" column that automatically signed him up for a Technology Service Internship class. Although, frightening at first, it opened new worlds that Juan would have never discovered otherwise. That same feeling has stayed throughout the journey and is a feeling he wishes to convey with anyone he is able to support. Juan Zarco is now currently a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago studying Computer Engineering and a Youth Leader with Youth Technology Corps (YTC) helping refurbish computers and lead in YTC's Summer Camps.

Featured Organizations

African American Mayors Association
Associated Students of Irvine Valley College
Climate 4 Sisterhood
Drexel University
Her Rising Initiative
Northwestern University

OneUpAction
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expandingleadership.org
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