



# 2021 Youth Empowerment Program

SUMMARY 2021

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# OVERVIEW

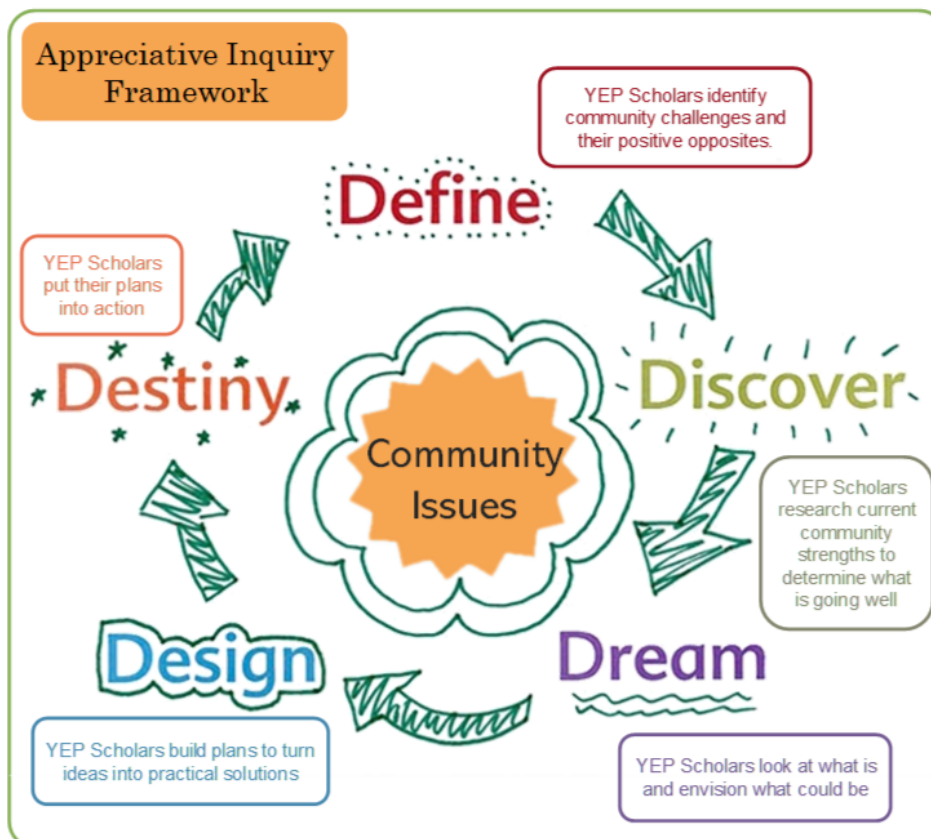
The Youth Empowerment Program trains 13- to 17-year-old youth to acquire awareness and skills as community leaders. It teaches them how to develop and implement plans for youth-identified needs and issues through policy. The goal is to improve their well-being and resiliency and to build the pipeline of future civic leaders.



Through YEP, youth become engaged, realize their true potential and assume leadership roles to better their communities. The youth become actively involved in influencing and advocating for policy changes. The program culminates in a Youth Empowerment Summit hosted by the YEP scholars.

Using an asset-based community approach with an appreciative inquiry framework, the scholars identify community issues, determine what makes them issues and create solutions ranging from programs to policy.

Asset-based community approach  
"builds on the assets that are already found in the community and mobilizes individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to build on their assets, not concentrate on their needs."  
- Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas





# ISSUE DEFINITION AND DISCOVERY

The Scholars developed definitions of the three issues: Bullying, Racism and Substance Abuse. Then they employed a mixed-methods survey approach to access community experiences with and possible solutions to Bullying, Racism and Substance Abuse.

## DEFINITION

- **Bullying** is a community issue because it leads to bigger problems including: suicide, ongoing violence and damage to both mental and physical health.
- **Racism** is a community issue because it leads to destruction caused by hate. It makes minorities feel inferior and it perpetuates hate. It also keeps certain people in an unequal unfair place.
- **Substance Abuse** is a community issue because it is the catalyst for many major social problems including: drugged driving, violence, stress and child abuse. It can further lead to homelessness, crime and joblessness.

## DISCOVERY SURVEY 1

The Scholars developed a quantitative survey that was shared via social media and emails. The purpose of this survey was to gain feedback on the relevance of the three community issues.

## DISCOVERY SURVEY 2

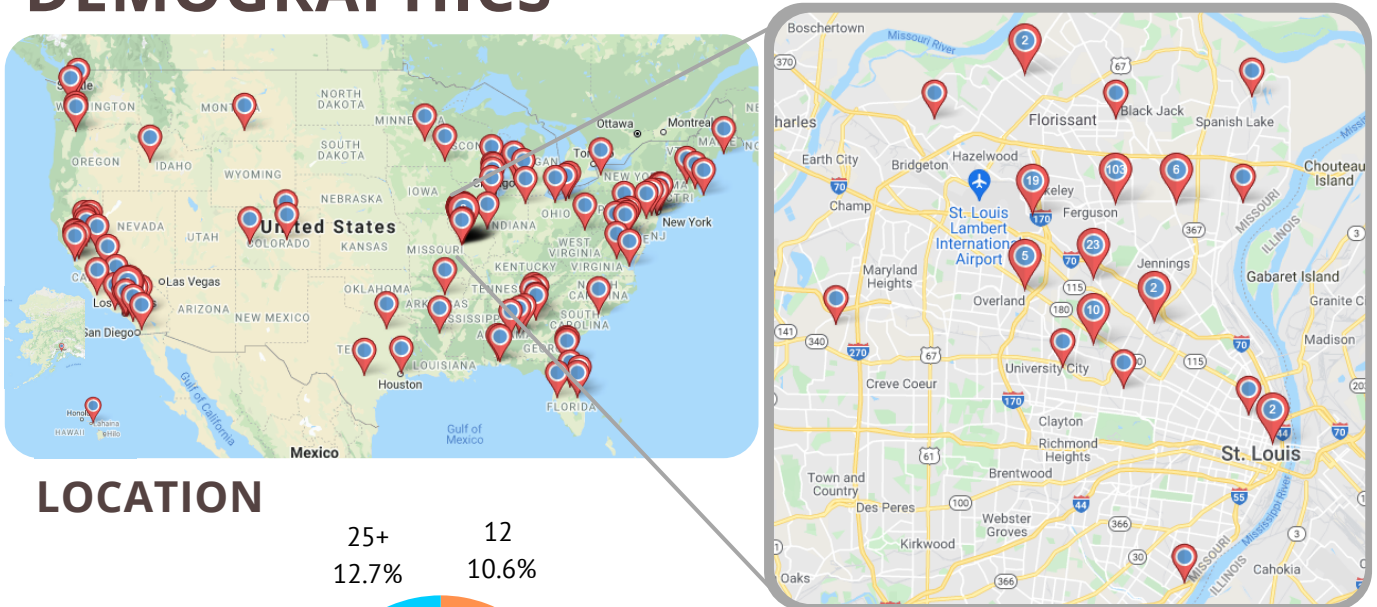
The Scholars followed up the initial survey with a second one to "Dive Deeper." This survey was qualitative in nature. Its purpose was to better understand existing community solutions and opportunities for each of the three issues.

Due to the safety precautions related to COVID-19, the majority of the YEP sessions were held via Zoom. The Scholars decided to do discovery via online surveys rather than host a Youth Empowerment Summit virtually.

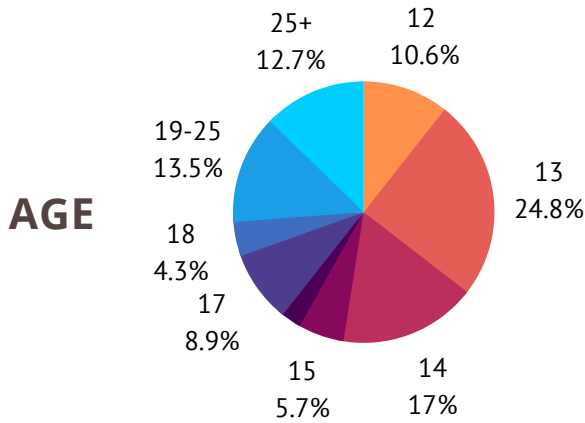
# SURVEY 1: COMMUNITY ISSUES

The Scholars used a quantitative method for this survey. They drafted questions that they determined would solicit the best responses among the target audience of teens between the ages of 13 to 17 years. This survey was published on the social media platforms of the partnering organizations from August 31 through September 19. The Scholars and Facilitation Team shared the survey link with their networks of peers, friends and youth organizations/programs. The survey gathered 297 responses from all over the United States. Some respondents represented demographics outside of the target audience.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

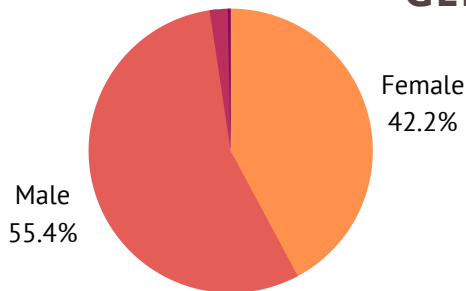


### LOCATION



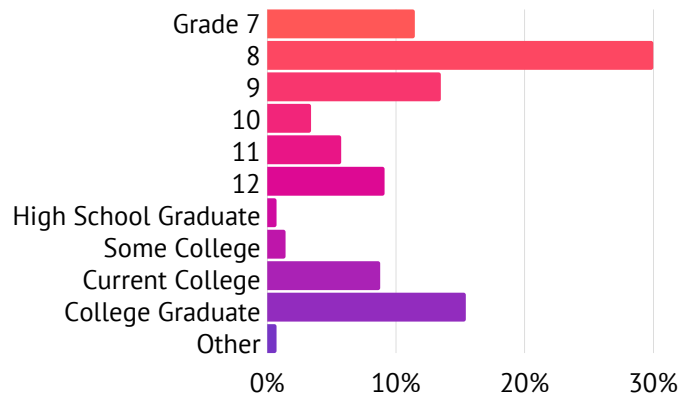
### AGE

Non-binary/ Gender Queer  
2%



### GENDER

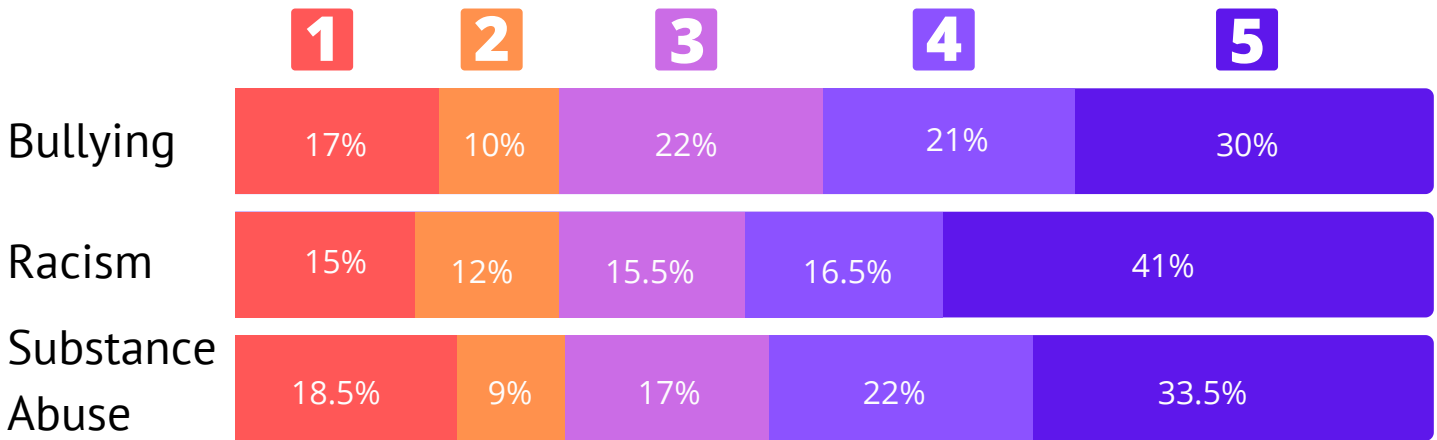
### EDUCATION LEVEL



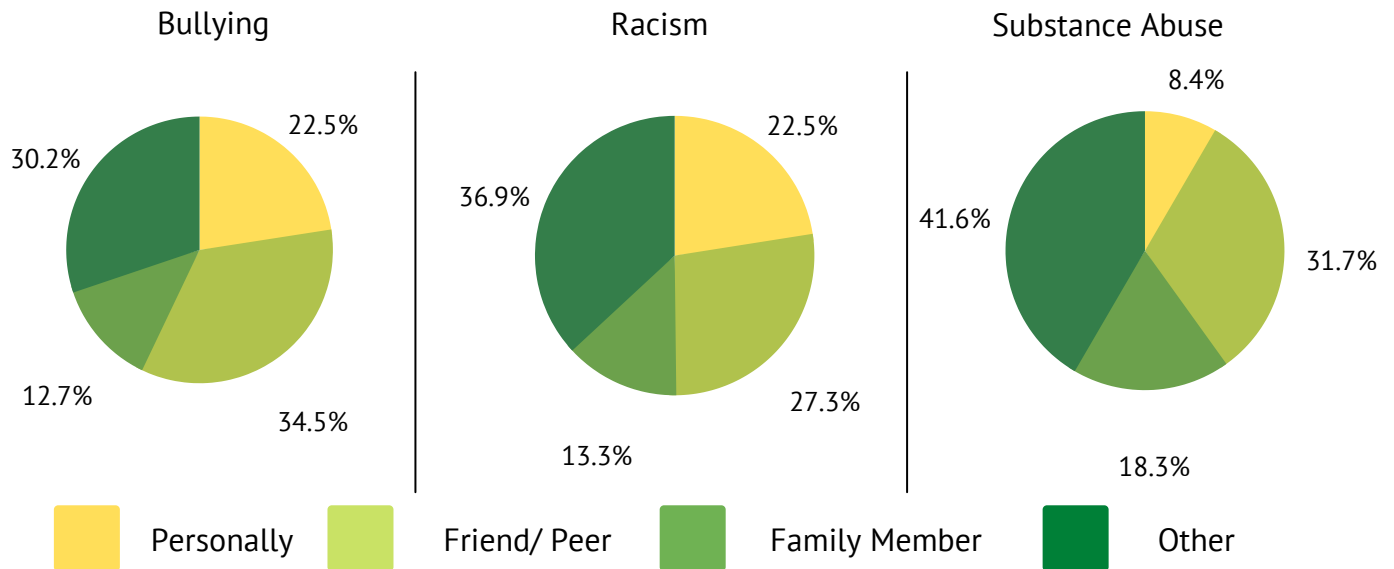
St. Louis respondents were mostly concentrated in North St. Louis County. A few respondents were from St. Louis City and others were from West and South St. Louis County.

# SURVEY 1: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

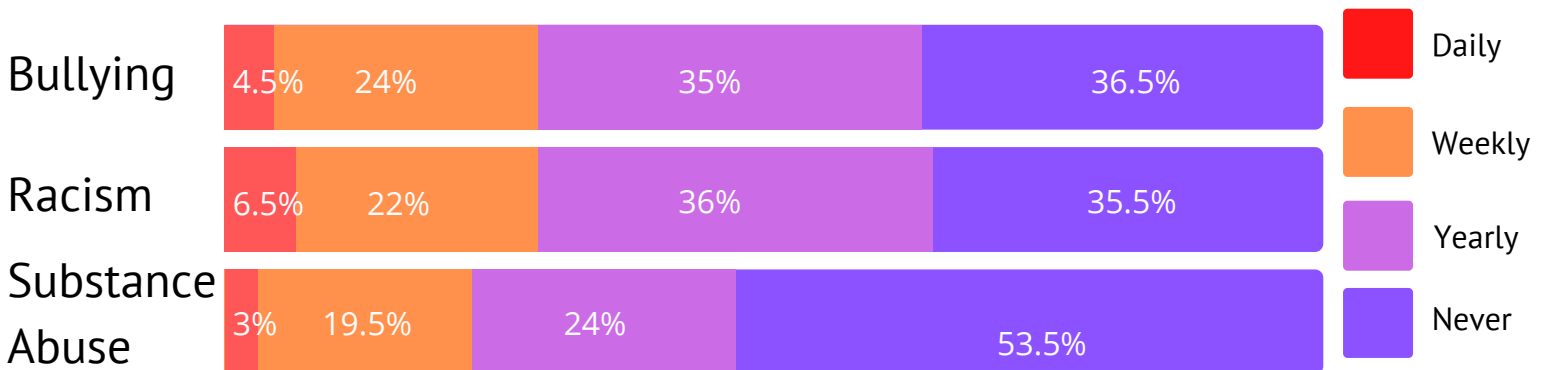
ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS ISSUE IN YOUR COMMUNITY: (5 BEING VERY IMPORTANT)



## HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THIS COMMUNITY ISSUE?



## HOW OFTEN DO YOU EXPERIENCE THIS COMMUNITY ISSUE?

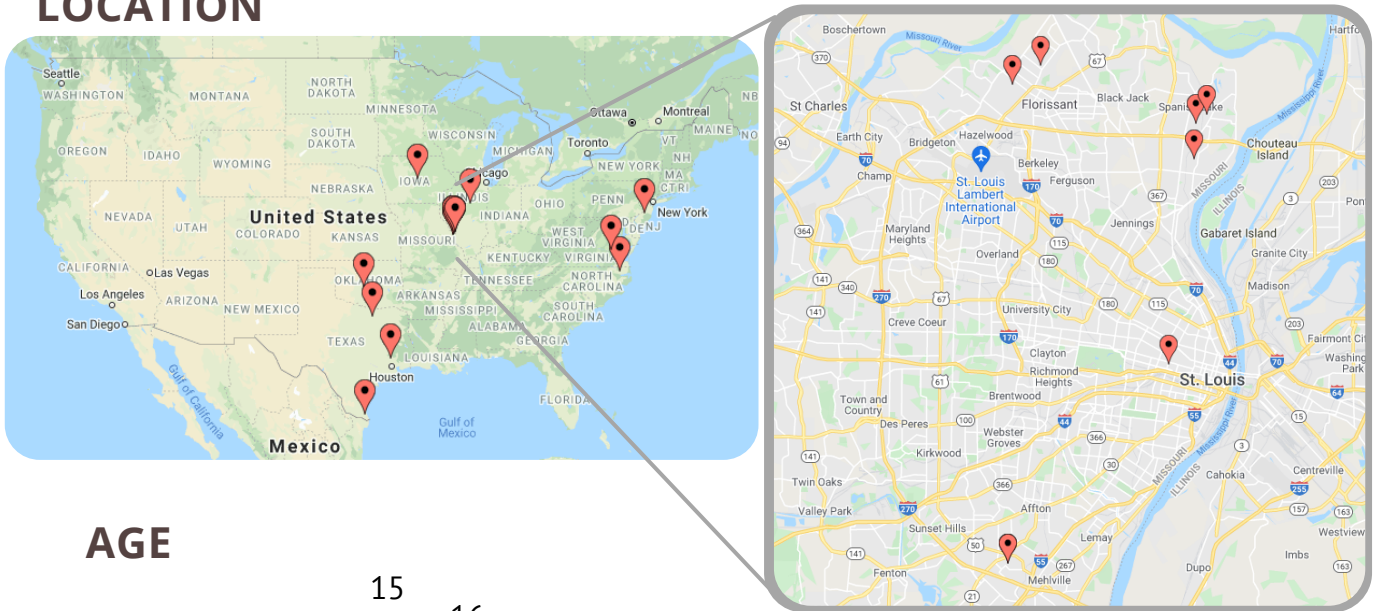


# SURVEY 2: DIVING DEEPER

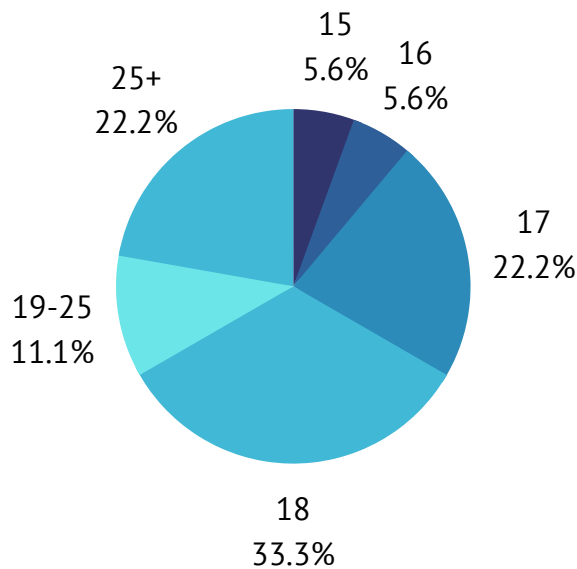
After review of the initial survey, the Scholars sought to dive deeper in learning about the community issues. The original goal was to conduct individual interviews and focus groups during the Youth Empowerment Summit at the end of the program. Due to COVID-19 safety precautions, the Scholars drafted a qualitative survey to be shared virtually instead. This survey asked short- or long-answer questions to gather thoughtful responses on the three community issues. Survey 2 ran for one week prior to the last session of YEP. It was shared on social media and sent to the networks of the Scholars and Facilitation Team. A direct request was also sent to the respondents of Survey 1. It gathered 19 responses.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

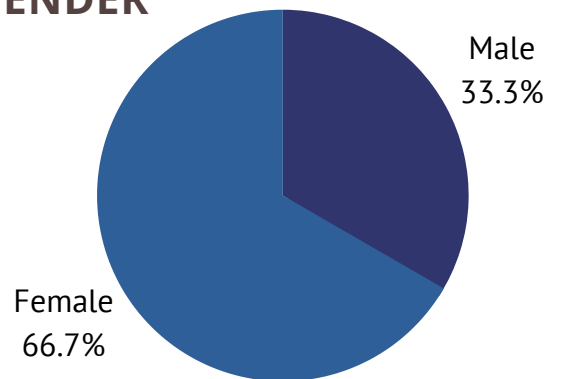
### LOCATION



### AGE



### GENDER



# SURVEY 2: BULLYING

The Diving Deeper survey asked participants the following:

1. What are measures that schools can take to prevent bullying?
2. What factors cause bullying to happen in the first place?
3. How should solutions deal with the "bully"?
4. Share examples where issues of bullying were resolved/learning and growth took place.
5. What are some personal examples, or stories you have heard of where bullying has been tackled with some success?

The respondents came up with several ways to prevent bullying through teaching kindness and respect. They identified policies that should be in place and resources that should be available. They suggested ways to help the "bully" solve issues that may have caused the behavior.

## PREVENTION

### Teach

- "Trauma-Informed" training for adults
- Acceptance and respect by embracing different cultures, races and abilities
- Addressing different types of stress
- Recognizing the effects of bullying

### Policy

- Define interventions
- Listen to victims and take them seriously
- Apply effective consequences through justice-based strategies
- Seek to understand the bully and their actions
- Monitor changes in student behavior

### Resources

- Behavioral health supports including counselors and trusted adults
- Safe spaces for victims to share experiences
- Anonymous tip line
- Posters, events and discussion forums to educate about bullying

## SOLUTIONS

### Consequences

- Restorative justice techniques that are "Trauma-Informed" and grounded in positive outcomes
- Family inclusive solutions
- Detention / Suspension
- Community service
- Mediation / Reconciliation

### Teach/Reinforce

- Teach youth to see, understand, accept and embrace differences
- Explain severity of bullying and how it affects victims
- Define bullying and why it is unacceptable
- Educate parents / guardians to recognize bullying and how to respond

### Support

- Try to understand why the bully is targeting the victim
- Speak to a counselor to work out underlying issues



# SURVEY 2: BULLYING

## RESPONDENTS SAY ...

"One of my friends had a issue with someone insulting her daily. She didn't feel confident enough to tell an administrator in person, so I persuaded her to send in an anonymous tip. The bully had a discussion with administration and soon after the insults ceased."

"I remember when the victim and the bully had a civil conversation, and after sharing each side, they grew to understand each other and left the conversation on good terms."

"A student was bullying a girl for her shaved head. What she didn't know was she was going through chemotherapy. When the bully's mother found out, she shaved her child's head and made her apologize to the student."

"I have some personal stories from my past as an immigrant in this country when people were trying to teach me a lesson, to show me 'how we do things here', and when I reminded them that people in this country are supposed to accept and encourage diversity of opinions, then they backed up quickly."

**"A special needs student had gotten bullied so they made the bully apologize and write an essay on positive things about the student."**

## SCHOLARS SUMMARY

After reviewing the results, the YEP Scholars summarized their thoughts of emerging themes and concepts that were discovered through the surveys. Here are some examples:

I think that maybe <sup>the people who</sup> that are getting ~~bully~~ bullied may tell the teacher or anybody else and a counselor may talk to the bully to see why their bullying folks

"... talk to the bully to see why they are bullying folks."

### Solutions to Bullying

Stand up for yourself / others

talk about it to a trusted or professional person

Draw and ~~understand~~ understand boundary lines.

"... stand up for yourself / others."

Bullying is an issue in my community because a lot of get bullied for little things and it needs to change

"... it needs to change."

### Possible Bullying Solutions

Education (often times ignorance on topics / empathetic values & habits can be untaught) Using people with higher authority / power to step in (parents / teachers / etc.)

"... ignorance ... can be untaught."

# SURVEY 2: RACISM

The Diving Deeper survey asked participants the following:

1. How do you think racism has affected the way you view the world?
2. What are you willing, no matter how small, to commit to doing to end racism that you are not already doing?
3. What's your earliest memory of that racism exist?
4. Share examples where issues of racism were resolved/learning and growth took place?
5. What are some personal examples, or stories you have heard of where racism has been tackled with some success?

The Scholars heard from people who had experienced racism first hand as well as from others who acknowledged they have privilege and don't truly know all the effects of racism. There was a clear contrast in perceptions among those who had experienced racism first-hand and those who learned about it in school. The respondents were willing to do a variety of things to end racism- including sharing stories, protesting and calling out racist behaviors.

## RESPONDENTS SAY ...

- "People don't see each other for who they really are and end up judging them based on what their culture or background may be."
- "I'm black so I get the short end of stick already. I see the world as way more unfair ... because of my skin color. It puts a fear in my heart when I see an officer I don't know or I'm traveling through a rural area or certain states. I get uneasy when I feel surrounded by white people. It makes life a little less free in my view and a lot more dangerous."
- "As a white person, I will never be able to comprehend the privilege I have just to walk on the street without fear. That being said, I view the world as a solemn place."
- "It causes me to think that the color of my skin is truly important in the way I get treated."
- "Being Asian has come with damaging stereotyped. People already have preconceived notions about me and how I act. I've become more cynical in the way I view things."

### COMMITMENTS TO ENDING RACISM

- Calling out family members
- Protesting
- Sharing personal experiences
- Hosting events to learn about different cultures and perspectives
- Not tolerating racist behavior by my peers and teachers
- Becoming anti-racist in my viewpoints and actions

### EARLIEST MEMORIES OF RACISM

- My parents using the N-word casually
- Learning about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and how people hated him just cause the color of his skin
- Stories about how our people, black people, were being killed and mistreated for no reason
- Michael Brown
- My boyfriend breaking up with me because his parents didn't approve of him dating a white girl
- Through advertisements

# SURVEY 2: RACISM

## EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS IT:

- "The best examples are those from college classrooms. When students of color discuss with white students many lessons can be learned."
- "N/A I haven't seen true change yet."
- "Growing up where I did, racism was resolved in anger, bullets and death. There is no productive growth being done."
- "With the Black Lives Matter movement, I feel like there had been a lot of learning and even more as it continues."
- "I have seen many people in my small town grow over the years, where initially they may have been uneducated and slightly racist even if they didn't realize, but they grew to understand the importance of Black Lives Matter and equality."
- "I've put myself in situations which require my growth and I've done my best to submit to those lessons with humility, openness and grace."

## SCHOLARS SUMMARY

Solutions to Racism  
Make racism more clear and recognizable to others and then help others learn that we are here our differences and similarities between ~~the~~ races.

"... help others learn..."

"... dismantle the long standing systemic structures..."

Possible Racism Solutions  
Work to dismantle the long standing systemic structures that have been built against minorities  
Education, personal stories so people can connect thru empathy

"... connect thru empathy."

It's a bit hard to come up with a solution only because racism is a taught/learned behavior. So maybe a solution would be for it not to be taught whether that be at home, school, with friends, etc.

"... racism is a taught / learned behavior."

Solutions to Racism  
I would say have them explore something else ~~so~~ so they fill some sympathy or empathy so we all can get to know instead of making a biased ~~decision~~ decision.

"... get to know before making a biased decision."

# SURVEY 2: SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Diving Deeper survey asked participants the following:

1. Thinking about programs such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), how do you think education on substance abuse can be provided to teens? At what age should the education begin?
2. What can teenagers/young adults do to assist with substance abuse education and prevention?
3. How can parents and other adults get involved with prevention education for teens?
4. Share examples where issues of substance abuse were resolved/learning and growth took place?
5. What are some personal examples, or stories you have heard of where substance abuse has been tackled with some success?

There was a general consensus that programs should start at a young age. When asked what teenagers, young adults and parents could do to promote education and prevention, the respondents almost all answered that sharing stories and setting an example were the most important ways to help the community. They also mentioned that having a gracious attitude is more beneficial than being harsh or judgmental in responding to individuals struggling with substance abuse.

## RESPONDENTS SAY ...

- Videos, seminars and classes should be backed by accurate and up-to-date information on health effects and social impacts of substance abuse
- Programs should not be taught by police
- Education can gradually start with videos at the elementary school level and then build up to skits, seminars or classes for teens
- Incorporate education into every day life

“ I think we are constantly told how bad drugs are, when the real problem lies in how GOOD they are. They provide a false sense of security and happiness when you are high, and when you come crashing back down you don't want to go back to them because of how "bad" they are, you want to go back because of how good they make you feel. As someone with an ex-addict father, I learned that early on and have never touched drugs in my life. I think knowing the truth about drugs as early teens is so important in order to keep kids on the right path. ”

### **What can teenagers/young adults do to assist with substance abuse education and prevention?**

Older students should be teaching the elementary and middle school classes as the younger children look up to them and may pay more attention.

### **How can parents and other adults get involved with prevention education for teens?**

- Set an example but don't act perfect
- Tell real life stories but don't make it too in your face to try and scare teens away from abusing substances

# SURVEY 2: SUBSTANCE ABUSE

## LESSONS SHARED:

- "My previous assistant struggled with alcohol abuse. We worked together to get him into treatment and I sat up nights with him when he was struggling to detox. It took a few tries, but he's four years sober now!"
- "My dad quit drugs right after I was born, and went on to become a successful business owner with five children and a wife of 20 years."
- "Just holding an intervention for a friend and having something personal happen like that can mean a lot."
- "One of the teens in my community was smoking and his parents did counseling and he stopped."
- "My friend got into a rehab center and now she has been clean for three years."
- "Teachers, police officers and students collaborating with mutual trust and respect."

## SCHOLARS SUMMARY

"... try to understand why they are doing what they are doing ..."

Solution for substance abuse  
I think trying to understand that persons who's going through that certain trauma and try to understand why they are doing what they are doing. Helping through the situation there in try to be there for a person. Sometimes you really can just be there to listen.

Possible Substance Abuse Solutions  
Awareness  
Treatment, access to help/resources needed  
Educate on harms  
Personal examples/stories of side effects  
so people understand the consequences before using

"... there are so many things that can start it."

"... access to help ..."

Solutions to ~~Substance Abuse~~ Substance Abuse  
Overall, It is hard to stop because there are so many things that can start it. So I would say expose them to the right things so it can be more preventive with it. Also, get them the other things that can get them to take their mind off the pain/problem.

"... be more preventive ..."

# CONCLUSION

The 2021 YEP Scholars completed the Define and Discovery stages of the Appreciation Inquiry Framework while developing their leadership skills in communication, facilitation and personal brand. As part of the program, each Scholar was required to envision where they would be by the age of 75 and how they would use the talents they identified through their CliftonStrengths assessment to shape their leadership journey.

## ADDITIONAL RESULTS

- **Two Scholars of the 2021 YEP Cohort have started college**
  - The Facilitation Team continues to support them and provide mentorship.
- **Four Scholars were appointed to the St. Louis County Youth Advisory Council**
  - The Council advises the County Executive, the County Council and relevant County departments on matters of concern to youth in St. Louis County.
- **Nine of the 16 Scholars in the 2021 YEP Cohort are continuing their leadership journey as part of the 2022 YEP Cohort**
  - They will advance their work with the Dream, Design and Destiny stages of the community issues of bullying, racism and substance abuse.

## SCHOLARS SAY ...

"I have been motivated and inspired."

"The issues that we talked about are really important because they impact communities in a major way today."

"I will use my leadership strengths that I've learn for school, career and with people."

“YEP is a way to improve and develop new skills, to have a better chance at becoming a leader and acknowledge world issues.”

"I find the ability to speak our minds and use our past experiences as a way to try making a change in our communities amazing."

“Discussing with other teen leaders and adult experts about community issues has been amazing!”

# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM



The Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) is for youth to acquire awareness, training, and engagement as community leaders; to recognize critical needs and issues; to learn how to develop and implement plans to address those needs and issues through policy; and to acquire the skills and support to improve their well-being and resiliency.

## 2021 YEP Facilitation Team

- Dwayne T. James, P.E.
  - Lakeisha Griffin, MSW
  - Terry Olishile
  - Peter Dry, Ed.D.
  - Keesha Byrd
- YEP is a collaboration of MU Extension, Wish Granted LLC, and The PDL Group.
  - The 2021 funding partners included Ready by 21 St. Louis, St. Louis Youth Violence Prevention Partnership, St. Louis City Health Department, Missouri Foundation for Health, Northside Community Housing, St. Louis Mental health Board, St. Louis ReCast and the University of Missouri Extension.
  - Special thanks to Sarah Kelly, Communications Intern at MU Extension in St. Louis County, for synthesizing the survey results and drafting this report.

YEPSTL.ORG



Graduation of YEP Scholars