



2023 Youth Empowerment Program

END OF YEAR SUMMARY 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Page 2 - Overview of YEP
- Page 3 - 2023 YEP Cohort
- Page 4 - Leadership and Community Issues
- Page 5 - Definitions and Discovery
- Page 6 - Gun Violence: Qualitative Take-Aways
- Page 7 - Diversity in Education: Qualitative Take-Aways
- Page 8 - Food insecurity in STL: Qualitative Take-Aways
- Page 9 - Trauma Inclusive School Reforms: Qualitative Take-Aways
- Page 10 - Youth Empowerment Summit
- Page 11 - Conclusion

OVERVIEW

Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) is a nine month cohort for high school students that focuses on learning leadership skills, public speaking, and community engagement. Through the cohort, scholars learn to identify issues affecting their communities, along with develop and implement plans for positive youth-led change. The program culminates in a Youth Empowerment Summit hosted and planned by the YEP scholars.

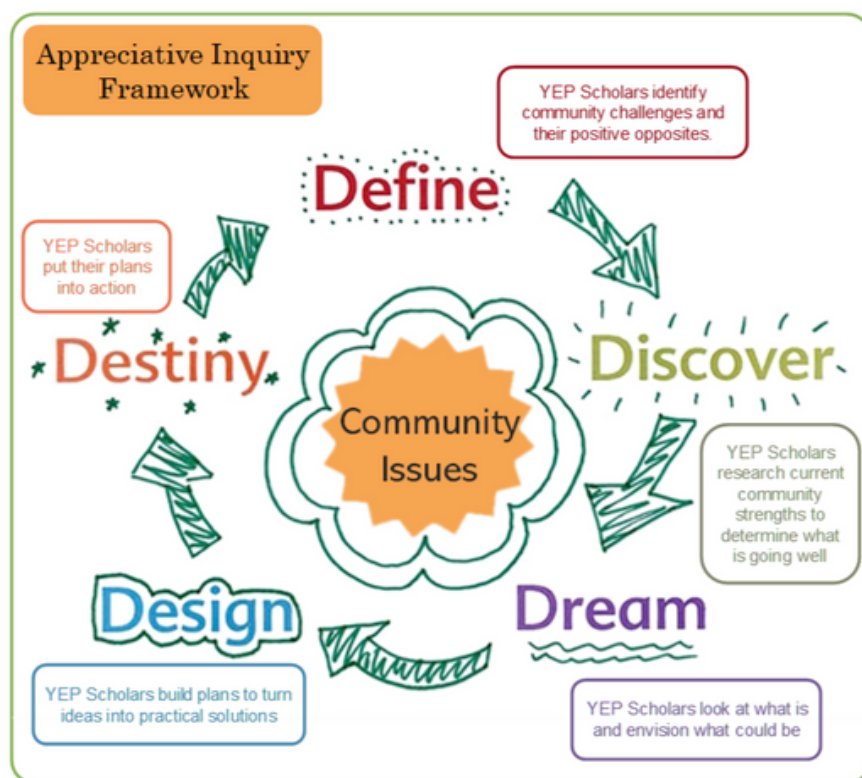
YEP has tier one scholars (first years) and tier two scholars (second years). Tier one focused on leadership vision with an emphasis on self-discovery, along with identifying community issues. Tier two focused on forming a community action plan and implementing that plan, along with continuing their leadership vision.

This year YEP partnered with St. Louis 4-H. Scholars get opportunities by being a part of 4-H as well such as participating in the STL 4-H June Demonstration Day. Additionally, this year three (3) YEP scholars attended the 4-H Youth Futures Conference at the University of Missouri campus in Columbia where they learned about college and career readiness.

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



2023 YEP COHORT

The 2023 YEP Cohort met on the fourth Saturday each month starting in December with a graduation summit in August. Fourteen scholars completed & graduated from this years program.

Tier 1

- Lailah Green
- Chaniya Hines
- Xavier Holmes
- Vedha Inampudi
- Olivia Karanja
- Eunice Kumbe
- Antara Panwar
- Aanya Singh

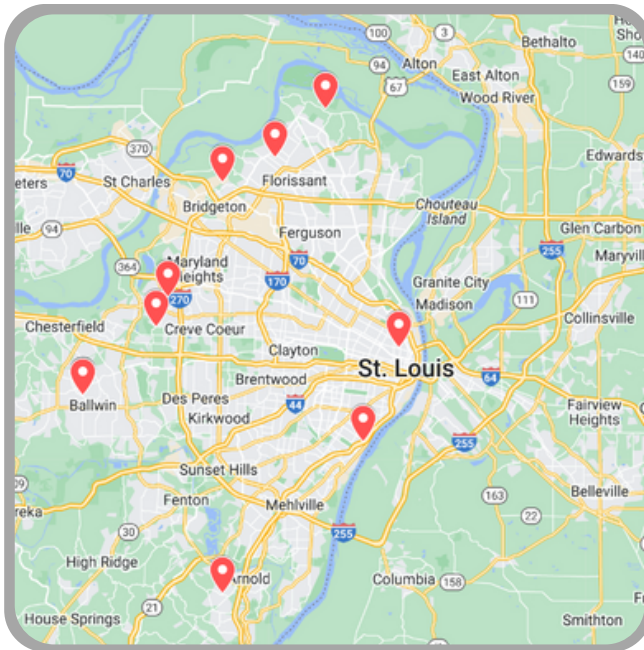
Tier 2

- Madisyn Benford
- Landon Hoener
- Brooklyn Morris
- Akilesh Rajan
- Arthur Schmidt
- Grace Gitau

DEMOGRAPHICS OF 2023 YEP SCHOLARS

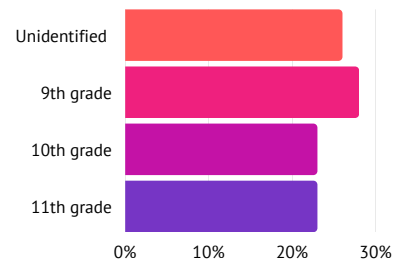
YEP serves youth from all across the St. Louis County and city region. With 23 participantss, an average attendance of 14, and 14 graduation scholars. See scholar demographic information down below:

LOCATION

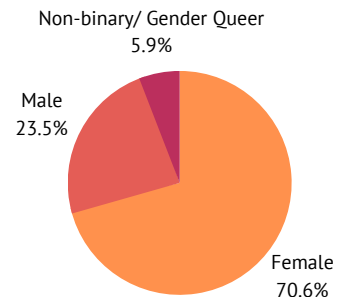


Scholar location ranged across St. Louis County and City

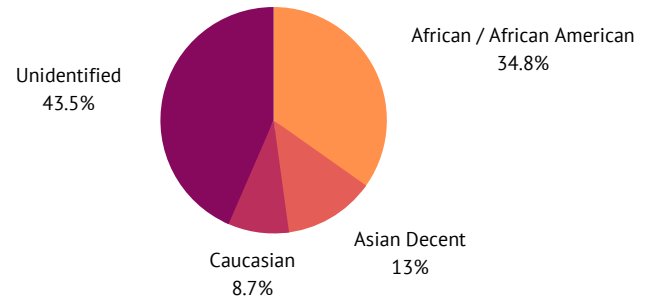
GRADE LEVEL



GENDER



RACE



LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

YEP focuses on giving youth the opportunity and skills to broaden their horizons and think about their future while identifying, developing, analyzing, and practicing their own leadership skills. Scholars work in groups and enjoy learning these skills together, giving them a sense of community within the cohort.

LEADERSHIP

Using the CliftonStrengths assessment by Gallup, the YEP Scholars began by identifying their natural talents.

Using this as a foundation, they learn to apply their talents in the following areas:

- Communication
- Public Speaking
- Facilitation
- Building Personal Brand

STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOLARS



YEP scholars use the skills they identify through the CliftonStrengths assessment to help self-identify as leaders, and build their own leadership abilities while collaborating with their fellow scholars. To help scholars understand what the CliftonStrengths assessment means and how they can utilize it on their leadership journey, YEP facilitators invited a CliftonStrengths professional coach Dr. Peter Dry to host a YEP session.

COMMUNITY ISSUES

Following the appreciative inquiry framework: Tier one scholars participated in the Define, and Discover phases; focusing on identifying community issues and developing surveys to gain better understanding of their community. Tier two scholars participated in the Dream and Design phases; analyzing the data from the survey they developed in the prior year to create an action plan for positive change. Through the Define and Discover stages of the Appreciative Inquiry Framework, the 2023 YEP Cohort focused on the following community issues:

GUN VIOLENCE

DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

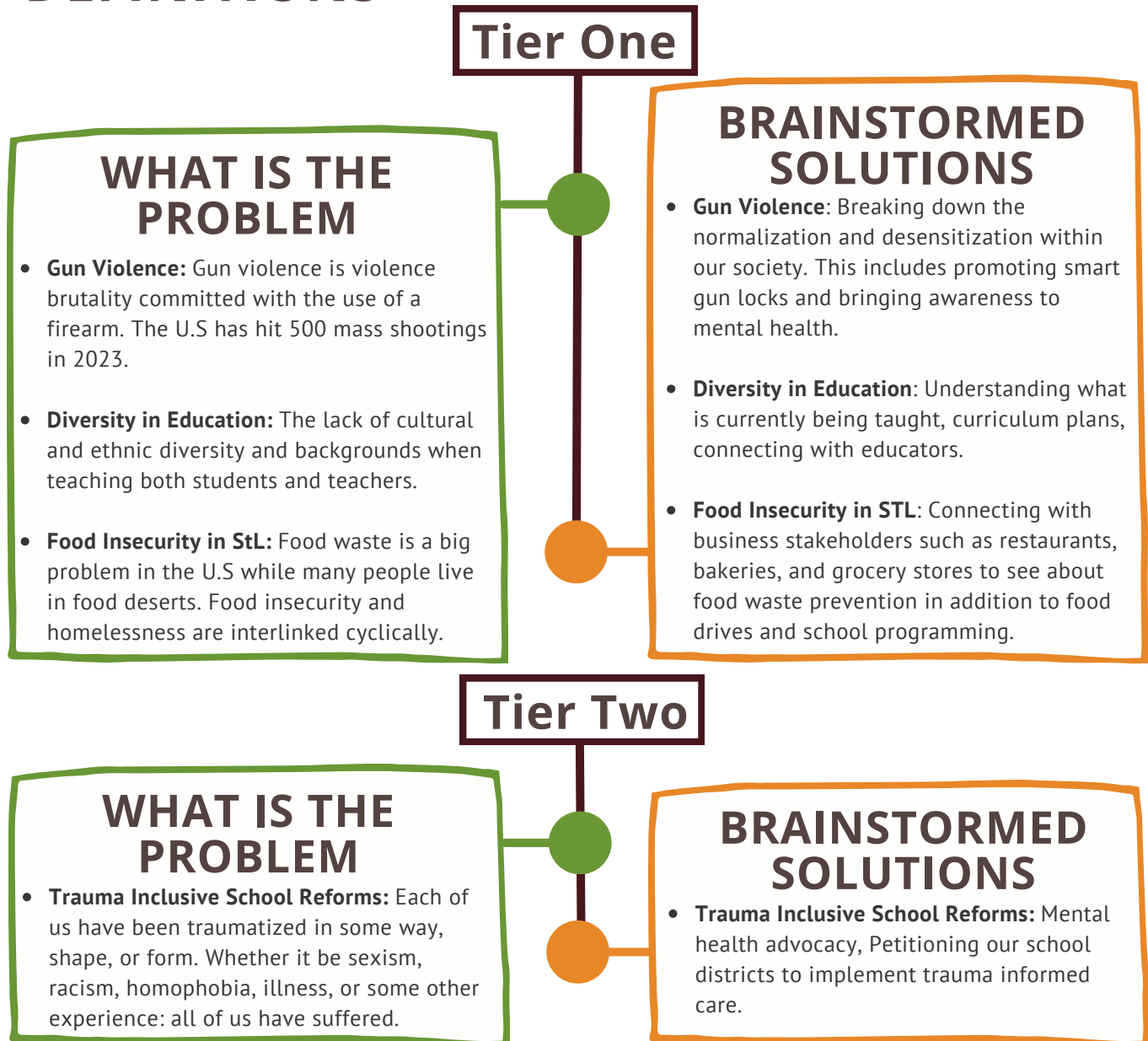
FOOD INSECURITY IN STL

SCHOOL REFORM

DEFINITIONS AND DISCOVERY

Tier one scholars identified definitions of three community issues: Gun Violence, Diversity in Education, and Food insecurity in STL. Tier two scholars focused on Trauma Inclusive School Reforms.

DEFINITIONS



DISCOVERY

Both tiers employed surveys developed by the YEP scholars to help them gather quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of these surveys was to gain feedback on the relevance of the community issues, access community experiences, and to better understand existing community solutions. Scholars drafted questions that they determined would solicit the best responses among local community. The Scholars and Facilitation Team shared the survey link with their networks of peers, friends and youth organizations/programs.

GUN VIOLENCE: QUALITATIVE TAKE-AWAYS

Gun Violence Causes

U.S. vs. Globally: Gun Laws

United States

- No federal restriction on semi-automatics, military-style guns, .50 caliber rifles, handguns, or large-capacity magazines
- No federal requirement for gun safety training
- State governments responsible for creating stricter gun laws

Canada

- Federal gun laws strengthened due to gun violence
- Gun law reforms: 28-day wait for gun purchase, required safety training, and bans on military-style guns and ammo

Israel

- Semi-auto weapon ban, one gun per person, and strict registration requirements (Israeli citizen, speaks Hebrew, mental health screening, demonstrates genuine need)

Japan

- Strict gun ownership requirements: complete a drug test, written exam, and mental health screening
- Mandatory gun storage inspections by authorities annually

Gun culture

- There have been 400 mass shootings in the U.S. since 2023 has started -- so why are guns presented with such glory in music videos?
- Guns being used to tell stories vs glamorization
 - Where to draw the line?
 - Aesthetics creating a new 'norm'?
 - Usage of the weapon: thrashing, firing, mindless
- The argument of "it's just a music video"
 - Music can change the way you feel and act
 - Integrated into every part of our lives-- spiritual rituals, children learn through songs, malls + cafes rarely silent
- Desensitization to tools used to commit violent acts
 - Who is the target audience? Usually children

"ONE MAN WITH A GUN CAN CONTROL 100 WITHOUT ONE."

Gun Violence and Mental Health

01

Mental Illness ≠ Violence

Studies show that mental illness contributes to only about 4% of all violence
Even w/ all serious mental health issues gone, >90% of violent crime would occur

03

The Flip Side

Depression, anxiety, trauma, PTSD, intrusive thoughts, sleep problems, personality changes, panic attacks, and suicidal ideation.



02

Potential Risk Factors

- Exposure to Violence
- A Past of Violent Behavior
- Excessive Use of Drugs/Alcohol

04

Takeaways

- Mental health NEEDS priority
- **ASK** for help when you need it
 - Remove STIGMA

Scholars bring awareness to Gun Lock availability at public libraries

Storage

The best storage for firearms are usually secure, hidden, high and dry

Different tools can be used to secure firearms securely such as lock boxes and safes

After securing your firearm, owners should also invest in a gun lock as well.

This is especially important for those who live in homes with children.



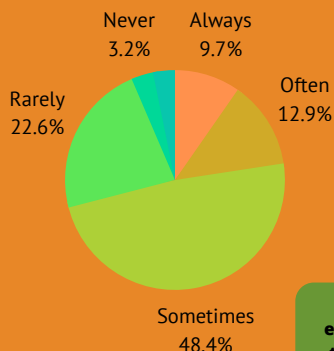
Gun locks are free and easily accessible at any Saint Louis public library

DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION: QUALITATIVE TAKE-AWAYS

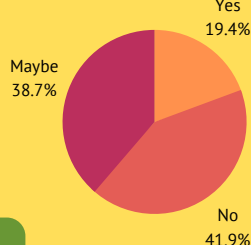
Survey findings

From 31 responses

How often do you feel that diversity is talked about at your school?



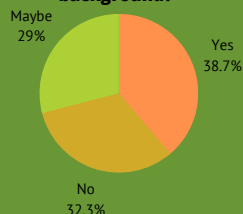
Does your curriculum focus on minority groups as much as other groups?



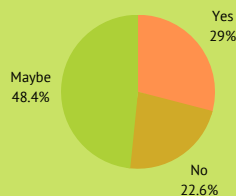
What do you feel like your school could do to improve awareness on diversity?

- Improve curriculum
 - Teach the cultural aspects and establishment of minority communities
 - Highlight minority contributions in STEM fields
- Talk About It
 - Hold discussions with student participation
- Educate the staff
- Culture Celebrations
 - Hold events/celebrations to learn about other cultures
- Address ALL Types of Diversity
 - Keep in mind that there are many types of diversity, for example, people with disabilities are often disregarded in relation to diversities

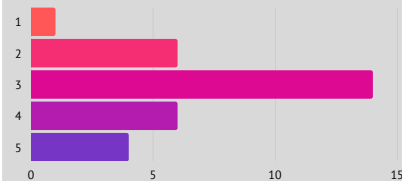
Among your peers does everyone receive the same type of treatment despite differences like race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or cultural background?



Has anyone ever made you feel bad about yourself in any way related to your race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or cultural background?



How often are minorities talked about/represented in your curriculum?



What does your school currently do to celebrate diversity?

- International Day
- Diversity Clubs and Councils
- Culture Fairs/Festivals
- Parades
- Heritage Month Videos and Celebrations
- MAC Scholars Program
- Multicultural Night

Many students claimed that their schools do little to celebrate diversity, and the majority of diversity events are student organized

IDEAS FOR ACTION PLANS

- Inclusivity and diversity council.
- International day.
- Awareness clubs/groups.

FOOD INSECURITY IN STL: QUALITATIVE TAKE-AWAYS

The Problem

- food desert
 - lack of access to healthy foods in terms of location
- healthy options are too expensive
- food waste
- homelessness and food insecurity are interlinked cyclically

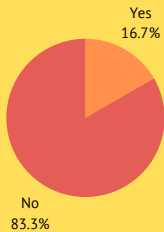
Action Ideas

- Food drives.
 - Plan this action.
- Connecting with restaurants and bakeries, grocery stores.
 - Turn over this leftover food to food packages (pre-made & not)
- Door to door food drive.
 - Healthy foods.
 - Provide staple foods along with food that has more water that people actually want.
 - Watermelon, soup, oatmeal, etc. – Keeps you fuller longer.
- Account for allergies.
- Youth and family.
 - School programs that provide food for students and staff that need it.
- Bringing awareness to this issue to teachers/school staff.

Survey findings

From 12 responses

Do you live in a food desert?



If you said yes, what is the estimated amount of food cost for you? What do you tend to get/eat?

"400.00/month"

"Most food here is junk food, it's hard to find fresh and healthy ingredients that are under \$5. all junk food is extremely cheap (like ramen) and so people gravitate towards that. Plus, all food here is heavy (even homemade because of the ingredients you buy) because of the amount of preservatives."

"300.00/month"

Has food insecurity directly impacted your life? If so, how?

"I will sometimes drive 5 to 10 miles from my home to purchase quality goods"

"yes... I'll feel bloated for about 12-24 hours and drinking water does not help. It feels gross to me..."

"not by much, but prices are getting scary"

"Yes, [because of] the rising cost of food and the quality of products sold in near by grocery stores."

Food Waste

Why do you throw the food that you throw out? What type of food do you tend to throw away? Do you tend to recycle or compost?

"I don't compost. I throw out food due to overcooking."

"I usually throw out dairy or produce items. Because I live in a small apartment, I'm unable to compost due to space and odor concerns."

"My family tends to throw away leftovers that are not eaten..."

"Anything that has gone bad must be thrown out or put through garbage disposal. I recycle what I can."

Do you tend to donate to food drives, food pantries, or donations?

%50% of respondents answered "Yes".

%50% of respondents answered "No".

For YES Answers

How often? How much do you tend to donate? What do you tend to give away? How did you get involved?

"I tend to give away canned goods about once a year with my family, typically for the Girl Scouts."

"Only when a drive comes up at school or church (a few times a year)."

"Maybe once or twice a year, I donate clothing and food items to local organizations. I usually give to Goodwill or nonprofits."

For NO Answers

Why? Is it not accessible to where you live? Are you unable to donate anything? Do you feel like the things you can afford to donate aren't appropriate to donate? Do you feel like it is not practical?

"I don't have enough food to give."

"There are drives at school, but typically I'm carrying multiple bags for sports, school, home, and a lunchbox. I just don't have the hands."

"I am unable to afford any more because I get the bare minimum."

"I am unable to donate...but it is a goal to donate!"

TRAUMA INCLUSIVE SCHOOL REFORMS: QUALITATIVE TAKE-AWAYS

Objectives

- Drawing attention to School Districts issues with staff and students
 - 2021 study
 - 42% felt sad or hopeless
 - 29% experienced poor mental health
- Petitioning our school districts to implement trauma informed care
- Peer Counseling

The Why:

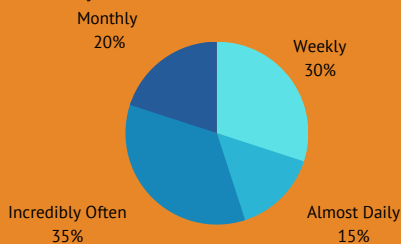
Personal Connection

- Each of us have been traumatized in some way, shape, or form. Whether it be sexism, racism, homophobia, illness, or some other experience: all of us have suffered.

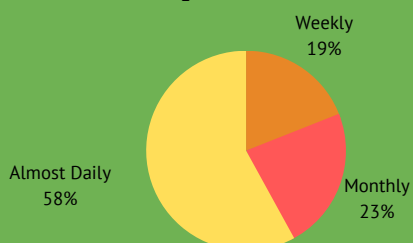
Survey Data

How often do you witness racial/ethnic discrimination

Not a single survey completer stated that they had never seen this discrimination.



How often do you witness gender/LGBTQ+ discrimination



Scholar Research: PTSD

- 70% (223.4 million) of adults have experienced trauma
 - 20% will develop PTSD
- 33% of youth are exposed to community violence
 - 7% will develop PTSD
- 8 million people have PTSD in a given year
- Black and Latinx people are more likely to develop PTSD
- PTSD clinical courses are poor in minority groups

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can develop after a person experiences or witnesses a traumatic event.

Forms Trauma Can take:

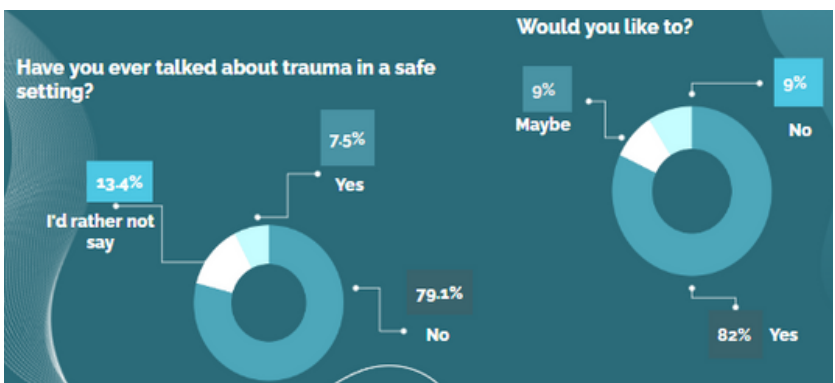
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Military Combat
- Violent Crimes
- Natural Disasters

Symptoms of PTSD:

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Avoidance of reminders of the traumatic event
- Hyperarousal
- Negative changes in mood and thinking

Plan Of Action

- Implement Peer support groups in school
- Create "Safe Rooms" for students
- Rotation of students for the safe rooms
- Students who work in the safe spaces can use their experiences for opportunity's later in life





2024 YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT

On Saturday August 12, the YEP Scholars presented their findings to parents, friends, leaders, elected officials and additional stakeholders. The 2024 Youth Empowerment Summit was planned by the YEP Scholars with each facet of the program being led by them.



Feedback from those in attendance:

"I think the summit went extremely nicely. It was nice to have our youth voices heard."

"I am inspired by the youth and their outlook and desire for change."

CONCLUSION

The 2023 YEP Scholars completed the Define and Discovery stages of the Appreciation Inquiry Framework while developing their leadership skills in communication, facilitation and personal brand. The majority of this years graduates have showed interest in participating in next year's cohort and continuing their reserch and leadership journeys.

SCHOLARS SAY ...

"One of the most invaluable lessons we've learned through this program is the art of self-advocacy. It's not just about speaking eloquently, but about understanding the power of our own voices and using them to advocate for our needs, dreams, and aspirations. Moreover, the skills honed here extend beyond the realm of public speaking, also assisting in the realms of effective leadership and social impact creation.

The Youth Empowerment Program has been a beacon of guidance in teaching the significance of compromise, leadership, and collaborative problem-solving. Through engaging discussions and team-based initiatives, we have learned strategies for fostering compromise, facilitating dialogue, and leading by example. This foundation in leadership equips us to face the challenges of our communities and society head-on."

-Akilesh Rajan, 2023 YEP Graduate. Excerpt from closing speech

"YEP is a program that allows you to connect with other teens w/a variety of skills to become a better leader."

“Clear and transparent communication fosters trust, collaboration, and understanding among team members. It allows me to articulate my vision, delegate tasks, and provide constructive feedback, which are essential for achieving shared goals.”

"That I have the qualities to be a leader."

"It's not like you're taking a class, but more like you're apart of a new community, and it just has that comfortable aura that allows me to speak about what my thoughts are."

"YEP has changed me to become a better person. Even as a leader for helping out on the community."

"Thank you for helping become a better leader!!"

“I learned that every one of my peers has something to contribute to the conversation.”

79% OF THE YEP SCHOLARS RATED THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH YEP AT 4 OR HIGHER OUT OF A 5-POINT LIKERT SCALE

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.

2023 YEP Facilitation Team

- Dwayne T. James, P.E., Ed.D.
- Keesha Byrd
- Austin Dial
- Peter Dry, Ed.D.
- Drachen Koester
- Melissa Scheer

- YEP is a program of the University of Missouri Extension (MU Extension) in collaboration from The PDL Group and other independent consultants.
- Funding partners include Missouri Foundation for Health, Missouri 4-H Foundation, St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission, St. Louis Mental Health Board, and MU Extension.



2023 YEP Cohort Summit