

# YOUTH UNITED FOR CHANGE



**APRIL 2025**

Check Us Out On Our Socials

[www.youthunitedforchange.org](http://www.youthunitedforchange.org)

## Message From Our Executive Director

**“We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” (June Jordan)**



The mission of YUC is increasingly critical as America reels from the daily actions of a Presidency dedicated to repressing and deleting the socio-political gains of the last 50 years. We remain firmly focused on making sure those most impacted by systemic oppression have the tools and skills we need to build the communities and world we deserve. We heed our Elders’ instructions to “Rock steady” and “keep your eyes on the prize” because we know “the people, united, will never be defeated”. At the end of each gathering or action, we join in solidarity to declare and embody the message of Assata Shakur, that “we must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains”.



**“YOUTH UNITED FOR CHANGE LAUNCHED IN 1991, AND BECAME AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION IN 1997”**

## ABOUT US

### Background / Who We Be

Youth United for Change (YUC) is a democratic organization primarily made up of working-class youth of color, which builds the “people power” necessary to hold school officials and government accountable to guarantee the educational rights of Philadelphia public school students. At YUC, low-income young people organize campaigns to ensure high-quality public education for all young Philadelphians. Our approach to youth-led advocacy amplifies the voice and impact of young people and the communities that support them towards creating systemic change; and creates the conditions for young people to simultaneously develop as critically strategic leaders.

The majority of YUC’s youth leaders not only attend public schools in dire need of additional resources, staff, and repairs, but they also come from diverse sections of Philadelphia that historically have been marginalized economically and politically. From YUC’s perspective, improving the quality of public education, and ensuring economic justice and an end to poverty go hand in hand. The organization’s goal is to develop young leaders who are empowered and equipped to insist through organized political action that access to quality public education is a basic right, regardless of their background or family income level. In particular, YUC is focused on dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and ending policies that criminalize students predominantly from communities of color; on ensuring full and fair education funding; on ensuring environmental justice and healthy conditions for all schools; and on advocating for Community Schools model of robust neighborhood schools that are hubs for community engagement, and provide wraparound services for students and their families.

## YUC Today

After enduring the double blows of a global pandemic and national social justice uprisings, YUC changed as an organization. By 2021, YUC had a new location, a new Executive Director, and a new team of youth organizers. By learning from our members and other organizations who do similar work around the country, we realized that we needed deep reflection on how we can best support youth in an increasingly repressive social and political climate. We know that our mission remains critical, and to advance our mission, achieve our vision, and remain relevant to our members, we need to expand how we connect with our community. We know that to face today's storms with confidence and clarity, we must look back at the lessons left to us by freedom fighters who have gone before us.

The youth of YUC stand firm in knowing that we are inheritors of a victorious cultural and social legacy. We are driven by the fact that we are our Ancestors' wildest dreams. We have come to answer the call to bring to life our dreams for our people's liberation. We affirm that here and now we can join together to heal ourselves, learn about ways to strengthen our communities, and build power to make the changes we want to see within ourselves, in our homes, schools, and communities using grassroots organizing as our primary tool.



## Grounding

Youth United for Change (YUC) develops young leaders in Philadelphia with a critical political, historical, and economic understanding of society, and empowers them to improve the quality of their lives and communities. Stated simply, YUC builds with African American and Latino young people who are most impacted by systemic injustice. We help them learn about social systems and practice organizing and civic engagement skills to make the changes they want to see in their communities. More deeply, YUC is a community of students, dreamers, artists, thinkers, writers, painters, singers, and dancers. As culturally aware African American and Latino young people, we know we are descended from brilliant and strong people who survived the horrors of genocide, enslavement, and colonization. In our blood, pulses the power of people who chose survival. We are walking miracles. We ground our work in the cultural traditions that have sustained us as a People. We organize and build power to make change from a foundation rooted in victory and from a place of joy, imagination, and possibility.

At YUC, we understand that one of the primary functions of oppression is to separate a person from their sense of humanity. We know that freedom means we have the power to recognize, affirm, and express our full selves in this life and time. We know that we are connected to a lineage of freedom fighters who span oceans and continents. We build our power by tapping into those roots and growing strong by learning their wisdom and connecting lessons to our current conditions so we can continue our people's work toward our collective liberation.



## Overview

YUC's work is connected to the areas of youth development, youth leadership, civic engagement, arts and culture, and social media. YUC's experience as an organization has taught us that in order to build power, young people deserve to have a healthy sense of self (safety) combined with a healthy connection with others in their identified communities. It is through the exploration of functional relationship modeling and intention building that youth and intergenerational community members unlock the possibility of functioning in an intentional community (belonging). We are cultivating and reinforcing the foundations it takes to learn about the history and systems behind our conditions (political education). With this knowledge, we can learn and apply traditional organizing tools, while also developing the ability to envision new techniques to reach young people and motivate action during these days and times (civic engagement).

## Mission

Youth United for Change (YUC) develops young leaders in Philadelphia with a critical political, historical, and economic understanding of society, and empowers them to improve the quality of their lives and communities.

## Our Vision

To develop the leadership of youth from communities of color who are capable of leading and governing all of society, using grassroots organizing as the training vehicle. To build an organization powerful enough to help create community-based power focused on maintaining the right of Black and Brown people to control their own lives. To produce leaders who can organize their communities to change the structure of society toward justice for all people.



## Liberty in Literacy

The "Liberty in Literacy" curriculum has been developed to assist students with reading comprehension, developmental reading, listening, decrypting, writing, and effective communication. Literacy, competence, and knowledge to articulate and advocate for the truth are liberating. It is mentally and physically freeing to comprehend the power of literacy.



## Teen Outreach Program

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) is a nationally-recognized, evidence-based program empowering teens with the tools and opportunities to build social-emotional skills, strengthen relationships, and avoid harmful behaviors. TOP promotes the positive development of adolescents through curriculum-guided, interactive group discussions, positive adult guidance and support, and community service learning.

TOP is delivered by trained adult facilitators over nine months to groups of teens (called "TOP Clubs"). TOP is designed to meet the developmental needs of middle and high school teens and can be implemented in a variety of settings, including in-school, after-school, through community-based organizations, or in systems and institutional settings, including residential facilities.

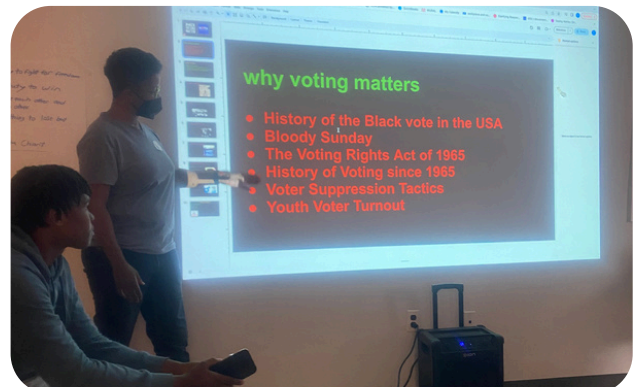
The TOP Curriculum is focused on key topics related to adolescent health and development, including building social, emotional, and life skills; developing a positive sense of self; and connecting with others.

## Collaborative Wellness

Collective care for YUC members, staff, and the community has always been a priority. From student check-ins to class discussions, YUC has made it our mission to create space for students to share their thoughts and emotions on how their service work personally impacts their unique lives.

Only in the past few years has the integration of whole-person wellness been implemented to better meet the replenishment demand of community service work.

The advent of whole-person wellness has brought a healing justice organizer turned Director Of Healing Justice to the YUC team; and, with the support of the staffing and youth at YUC, created a Wellness Room. The wellness room is a space filled with decompression tools and a cozy atmosphere for students to take a pause when necessary.





## Tricia Hersey The Nap Ministry *Rest Is Resistance*

Wellness can be accessed through a number of realities including a walk in the park to spending time with friends or doing nothing. Simply permitting oneself to do nothing is incredibly important in a world worshipping capitalism, imperialism and hegemony working to re-establish harmful elements of forced labor. When you choose to do nothing you are participating in a resistance in support of rest by not consuming nor feeding into systems of oppression; instead you are healing yourself.

One way of intentionally doing nothing and creating a restorative space for yourself is through breathing exercises. Breathing exercises encompass various techniques to improve lung function, reduce stress, and promote relaxation, including pursed lip breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, box breathing, and alternate nostril breathing.

Here's a breakdown of some ways to assess and address self with self for self. \*Note no one thing works for everyone. Consider finding what resonates for you and leave the rest!

1. Consider the impact of your next three steps:

- **How: Consider a pause (Take a beat)**
- Inhale slowly through the nose, then exhale slowly and gently through pursed lips, as if you're blowing out a candle.
- **Benefits:**
- Can help slow down breathing, make each breath more effective, and improve oxygen intake.

2. Diaphragmatic Breathing (Belly Breathing):

- **How:** Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing your stomach to rise while keeping your chest relatively still. Exhale slowly through pursed lips.
- **Benefits:** Promotes relaxation and can help reduce stress and anxiety.

3. Box Breathing (4-4-4-4 Breathing):

- **How:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, and hold for 4 seconds. Repeat several times.
- Repeat several times.
- **Benefits:** Can help calm the nervous system and reduce stress and anxiety.



4. Alternate Nostril Breathing:

- **How:** Sit comfortably, close one nostril with your thumb, inhale through the other nostril, close that nostril and exhale through the first nostril. Continue alternating nostrils with each breath.
- **Benefits:** Can help balance the nervous system and promote relaxation.

5. 4-7-8 Breathing:

- **How:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds.
- **Benefits:** Can help calm the nervous system and promote relaxation.

6. Lion's Breath:

- **How:** Inhale deeply, then exhale with a loud "ha" sound, sticking out your tongue.

**Benefits:** Can help release tension and promote relaxation.



# Safety, Belonging, Civic Engagement, Political Awareness...

## Healing Justice (Safety)

YUC's work helps young people gain awareness of their conditions. This awareness often comes with an emotional cost as people realize some of their struggles are a direct result of intentional decisions. Healing justice means we understand that the work for social transformation can be hard and painful. As freedom fighters and survivors, we get to have the space and time to tend to our individual and collective wounds. At YUC we emphasize youth's right to receive the nurturing they need to build the power to continue to grow in social justice movements throughout their lifetime.

Cara Page and Erica Woodland coined the term "Healing Justice" and defined it as: "... a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on intergenerational trauma and violence, and to bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our collective bodies, hearts, and minds." - Cara Page, Kindred: Southern Healing Justice Collective

YUC's healing justice offerings help to establish a sense of safety through practices and experiences such as wellness techniques infused into regular team meetings and workshop structures. There are also workshops and specific training in African/Latinx/Indigenous individual and community wellness practices (somatic, sound bowls, sage smudging, drumming, etc.) YUC's Director Of Healing Justice convenes events for collective care.



## Teen Outreach Program (belonging)

TOP is comprised of three areas designed to help adolescents from systemically oppressed communities to develop a stronger sense of self, improve peer relationships and deepen their connections to their communities through service learning.

"The TOP Curriculum is informed by research in adolescent development and best practices in positive youth development. Given what we know about how to develop teens' competencies and pave the way for a successful transition into adulthood, the curriculum focuses on three core content areas that work together as protective factors, reducing the impact of risk and promoting positive youth development: skill-building, developing a sense of self, and making connections.

Research shows that supporting teens in these areas leads to a variety of positive outcomes, including increased pro-social behavior, lower levels of problem behaviors and emotional distress, and improved academic performance. From adolescent brain research, we also know that these competencies addressed in the TOP Curriculum are malleable well into young adulthood, particularly when teens are given opportunities to practice emerging skills within safe and supportive environments guided by adults who are caring, responsive, and knowledgeable." ©2017 WYMAN TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM® | FACILITATION





## Civic Engagement

YUC collaborates with PA Youth Vote to support shared efforts around voter education, voter registration, and Get Out the Vote. The community connection activity of TOP Club members also focuses on these efforts.

## Political Education (political awareness)

YUC organizers have worked diligently to create learning content that helps young people gain a clear understanding of how our society operates. Additionally, Organizers have been trained to facilitate the political education curriculum developed by School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL). We use the content to engage our base in political education learning sessions related to capitalism, racism, patriarchy, oppression, and liberation.

## Literacy Support

The work of political education and community organizing requires a lot of study, reading, and writing. In our work with youth, we learned that they benefit from additional support for their literacy skills. Our public school system has produced learners who are not always confident in their brilliance. YUC has engaged a literacy specialist who offers tools to strengthen youth's literacy competence.

## Youth Leadership Team: Great Minds Think

The Youth Leadership Team (YLT) is a crucial aspect of the continuation of YUC's current campaign work and membership's leadership and political development. YLT members express their power in the organization through: co-designing workshops, planning and evaluating activities, setting recommendations and priorities for campaigns, and managing our social media. In efforts to support the leadership capacity of members, YUC has partnered with Engage R&D to develop the youth participatory action research project, "Great Minds Think". Participants attend learning and working sessions in person, or virtually (in the case of inclement weather).

## Great Minds Think

Youth United for Change (YUC) wants to learn what African American and Latino youth aged 13-25 living in Philadelphia think about their strengths and needs related to civic engagement, education, employment, housing, mental health, and public safety.



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The survey should take 10-20 minutes. Please contact [recruitment@gmail.com](mailto:recruitment@gmail.com) if you have any questions.

Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts on YUC's "Great Minds Think" survey. Please take your time. Your opinions matter! Your thoughtful response helps us know what our peers are thinking about our lives and about the systems that impact our lives.



GREAT MINDS THINK SURVEY YOUTH UNITED FOR CHANGE



## Great Minds Think: Youth Reflections

YUC Youth Leadership Team members initiated a youth participatory action research project to learn about attitudes and feelings toward the perceived impact of social systems in their lives. Social systems were defined as the network of institutions, individuals, and group thoughts, concepts, and practices that determine social structure, and social norms.

**How does learning how to conduct research help young people build the power to make change in their schools/communities?**



**If young people know how to conduct research, then they will be able to look into specific struggles or disparities in their community or others.**

- Christopher

**I believe that if we can ask the right questions, we can get to know the issues that young people face in their schools and communities, which can inform the YUC campaigns and create change that way.**

- Luis



## Why did you Join This Data Project?

**I've been wanting to make a change, and the school I go to is too far away to be able to stay at every other club, so now, from home, I know I can be useful; it's just a lot more flexible for me.**

- Isabela/Olivia



**I just wanted to get back involved with YUC, and when I saw this opportunity was available, I jumped into it.**

- Kaylee

Youth United for Change (YUC) wants to learn what African American and Latino youth aged 15-24 living in Philadelphia think about their strengths and needs related to civic engagement, education, employment, housing, mental health, and public safety. This "Great Minds Think" survey was designed to help the YUC know more about your thoughts and opinions. The responses you provide to this survey will be anonymous and will be used to inform and strengthen YUC programming and campaigns. Some of the questions in this survey may touch on sensitive topics. Your comfort and privacy are very important to us. Please know that you are not required to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You can skip any questions at any time without it affecting your participation. Your responses, whether partial or complete, will remain confidential.

The survey should take 10-20 minutes. Please contact [yucyouth@gmail.com](mailto:yucyouth@gmail.com) if you have any questions.

Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts on YUC's "Great Minds Think" survey. Please take your time. Your opinions matter! Your thoughtful response helps us know what our peers are thinking about our lives and about the systems that impact our lives.







## New Era, New Image

In the Spring of 2024, our youth leaders recommended that YUC refresh our logo. They noted that while our mission remains the same, as an organization, we have changed location, leadership, and team members and developed new ways to build youth power. Our youth leaders wanted a new logo to represent the new era of YUC

So, our youth leadership team and staff members spent months working with a graphic designer (Lanier Images, LLC), to craft an image that expresses the mission and work of YUC. Our youth leadership team wanted a symbolic, engaging, and beautiful logo in which they see themselves reflected.



## ‘Da Breakdown

The members of YUC wanted an image that spoke to Black and Brown youth. That's why the human head of the logo is a young person with facial features (nose and lips) similar to Black and Brown people. They wanted patterns and colors that evoked a sense of energy and motion; so there are flowing shapes, bright colors, and vibrant patterns throughout the logo. We also wanted to include symbols that represented the specific work of YUC.

**Black Power Fist:** represents our political education work and the tradition of building people's power through grassroots organizing.

**Butterfly:** represents our healing justice work and the power of transformation and collective care

**Liberty Bell:** represents our political education and civic engagement activities specifically impacting Philly.

**Sankofa bird:** represents our grounding in the historic and transcontinental freedom traditions of Black and Brown people. A key way of building youth power is to know that we come from power and that we are continuing the legacy of our Ancestors. The Sankofa bird is a symbol of the Akan people of Ghana, representing the teaching, "Go back and fetch it" meaning, learn from your past to build your future.

## Reintroducing the Team

**Celeste:** I am the Teen Outreach Program Coordinator, Empathetic Activist, Femme Latine

Quirky Fact: I love fictional creatures

**Jai Thompson** (They/Them) or Thompson (They/Them): I am a Philadelphian. I am a forever student. I am your cousin, your older sibling, I am an activist. I am visible. I am employed to support with the build of power and to participate in listening to new and innovative ways to make change. My title supports the oversight of the Healing Justice program at Youth United For Change. As such I am a forever dreamer.

Quirky Fact: I like Candy Corn

**Jaelyn Neal-Holland:** Office manager and literacy support specialist, I am a dreamer and a maker of change

Quirky Fact: I am an advocate for black and brown youth by day and a superstar singer by night

**Toni Mack** (She/Her): I am Toni. I am Lea and Dickey's baby. I am from Dogtown/Mount Airy. I am a dreamer, visionary, waymaker, and leader who is joyfully grateful to serve as Executive Director Of YUC. Quirky Fact: I know almost every Bob Marley song

**Emmanuel Jones** (He/Him): I am a Philadelphian, lifelong learner, artist, and editor of YUC's newsletter.

Quirky Fact: I love to cook

**Naila Mattison** (she/her): I was raised between West Philly and El Cajon CA. I am the person that quietly shifts the world, from behind the scenes. My role with YUC is to manage all things marketing, from digital to in person media opportunities

Quirky Fact: yea, I just am.



## "STILL HERE, STILL HOLDING" BY FITCH MEANS (PHILLY BASED R&B ARTIST)

In the cracks of cracked pavement,  
where murals bloom brighter than pain,  
we gather—soft, strong,  
scabbed over but singing.

The news cycles spin like turntables,  
scratching stories on our backs,  
but we dance anyway—  
in basements, block parties, and breath.


The system bends heavy,  
but so do our voices—  
bending bars into bridges,  
into beats, into brush strokes.


Art is our archive.  
Resistance is our rhythm.  
We don't just survive—we sample,  
remix, reclaim, remind.

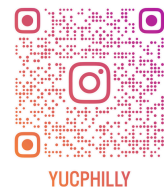
That even now—  
in the thick of fear and fatigue,  
we are still here,  
still holding.  
Still Philly.  
Still family.

## Check Us Out On Our Socials

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## Message From Our Editor

Thank you for reading YUCs new monthly newsletter. I am honored by the opportunity to compile this work for you. I am writing this excerpt as a reminder to our readers of the importance of the literal pause and collective distance from capitalism, utilizing the *Nap Ministry* and Paulo Freire as points of reference.

Tricia Hersey in the text *Rest is Resistance* writes, “My personal attempt at disrupting capitalism and white supremacy and capitalism by resting does not appear to be a goal with an unattainable end because as I evolve and heal, evil is always present. A valuable question is: how can we afford to rest when the colonizing empire we live within daily continues to rage on and grow stronger?” (Hersey, 2022 p.58)

In observance of Earth Day, I ask that you go and touch some grass. Take a moment to ground yourself in your reality. What are the conditions of your life? Which of those conditions do you control and how can you improve them? For conditions outside of your control, how do you accept them and push forward? As Michael Jackson said, it starts “with the man in the mirror”. Consider taking the time to step back, pause, and analyze the parts of your life that you have the capacity to conceptualize in real time. Look to understand your behaviors, habits, and ways of thinking in order to learn what is healthy and benefits you and what does not.

Many of us fall into a “grind mindset”, which may seem advantageous given our society’s focus on the material, but it is ultimately destructive to our humanity. As stated in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “The oppressed, who have been shaped by the death affirming climate of oppression, must find through their struggle the way of life affirming humanization, which does not lie *simply* in having more to eat (although it does involve having more to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect)” (Freire, 2017, p. 26). I acknowledge the external pressures that make us feel like we should always be working, from the inflated cost of living to worrying about job security, or familial pressures to provide. But if you spend every moment working you will find that it is substantially detrimental to your overall wellness. It is bad for your mental health, physical health, social health, and more. Thus, it is essential that you exercise the freedom to rest and feed yourself. In doing so you can create space for healing yourself and your community.

For many of us trapped in cycles of forced labor in an effort to keep up with everyday expenses; the idea of taking time to rest may seem like an impossible task. While you may not be able to take a full day off from work, consider taking 60 seconds to try some breathing exercises or five minutes to go outside to feel the sunlight. By doing this you can improve your physical, mental, and spiritual health. I often find that after spending time outside I feel calmer, lighter, and more appreciative of my life’s circumstances. That is not to say that exposure to sunlight will erase all of life’s problems, but intentionally creating space for rest, and connecting to nature can absolutely improve your health and wellness.

*Thank You*