

# Youth In Action!

CELEBRATING



NAZA's *Youth In Action!* is a network of young people taking action on the issues they care about.



# 1,400+

Middle & elementary school youth in NAZA-Funded afterschool programs participating in youth-led projects



# 86%

of afterschool program participants (2023-2024) felt that they grew from participation in Youth In Action



# 7

National and local conferences

# 31,680

Hours spent planning and implementing community projects and events



# 98%

of afterschool program participants (2023-2024) felt proud of their final project



# \$144,389

Funds invested in youth-led projects and initiatives



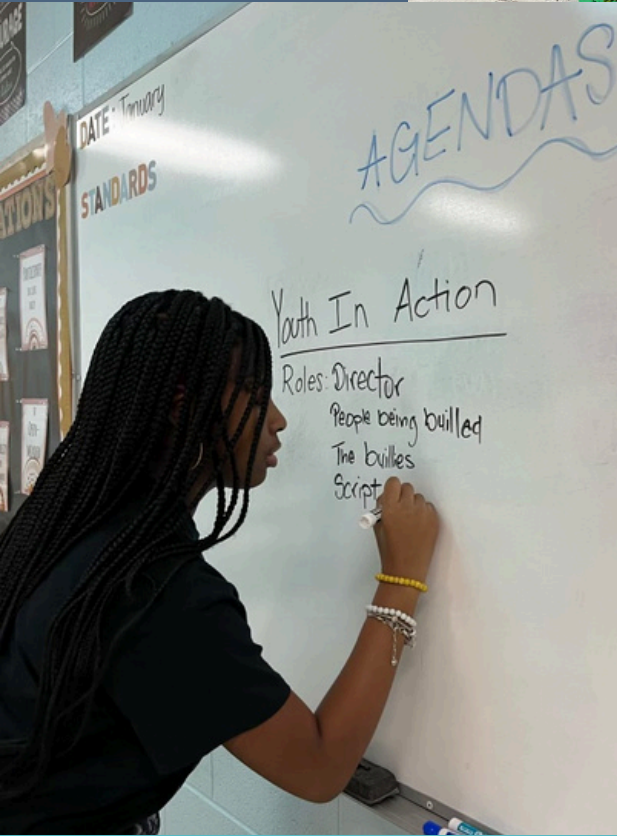
66

Youth  
Community  
Leaders  
(high school  
students)



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97%

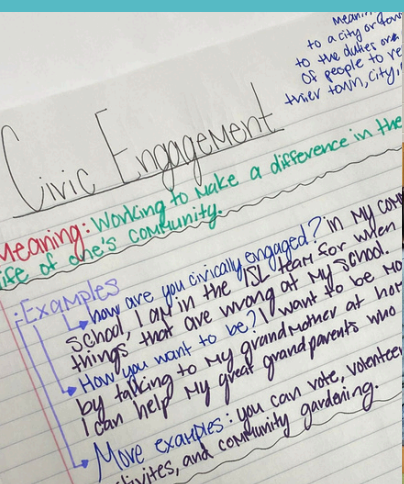
of afterschool  
program  
participants  
(2023-2024)  
felt their project  
impacted their  
community

98%

of program  
staff (2023-  
2024) felt pride  
in their students'  
YIA project

30

Youth-led  
community  
projects



# Background

## ➤ **Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA)**

NAZA is a partnership between the Nashville Public Library, Metro Nashville Public Schools, the Mayor's Office, and over 40 youth development organizations all working collaboratively to increase access to transformative learning experiences for youth during out-of-school-time hours. Since its creation, NAZA has invested public and private funding in afterschool and summer programs to ensure that all youth have access to high-quality programs at no cost. In the past few years, NAZA has expanded its model to focus on strengthening youth-centered organizations' ability to support youths' 21st century skills, social and emotional learning, and holistic youth outcomes including cognitive, physical, and emotional development.

## ➤ **The Vision for Youth In Action!**

NAZA believes that an elevated youth voice is vital for any city to be connected, and is important when looking at areas for improvement within one's community. However, NAZA feels that youth voice is excluded far too often, especially related to important decisions that directly affect young people. NAZA is striving to create a network for youth across Nashville and Davidson County that gives young people a supported platform to voice their opinions and ideas for reform, and furthermore teach the youth about advocacy and how to become involved in an area they are passionate about.

## ➤ **Guiding Principle: Keeping the Work Youth-Centered**

The *Youth In Action!* (YIA) model works to keep the work youth-centered by prioritizing the following:

- I. Infrastructure that incorporates youth voice
- II. Creating leadership opportunities for youth
- III. Change that stems from youth
- IV. Hearing opinions of youth affiliated with the organization
- V. Emphasizing strategies that support youth engagement
- VI. Integrating regular youth feedback

## ➤ **The YIA Model**

High school students served as Youth Community Leaders who worked with middle schoolers enrolled in NAZA-funded afterschool programs. These leaders helped educate the younger students about advocacy and youth voice, and supported the middle schoolers in planning and implementing community projects.

Youth leaders also participated in national and local policy, advocacy, and research work, to elevate youth voice to higher levels of decision-making. Youth spoke at national conferences and participated in research projects and grant initiatives.



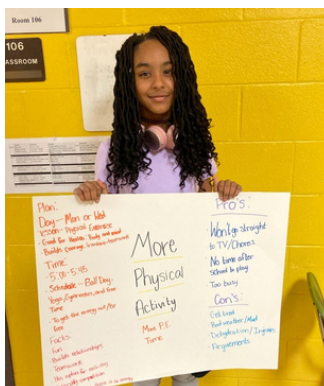
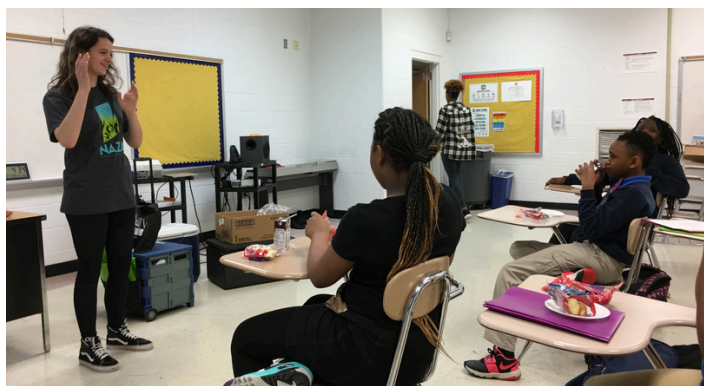
# Milestones

## ➤ 2019-2020

In 2019, NAZA launched an initiative to promote youth leadership and elevate youth voices in Nashville. NAZA intern Allie Duke developed the *Youth In Action!* (YIA) program based on this need. Two groups were formed: the Youth Matters Committee, comprised of 20 youth who worked with middle schoolers in NAZA-funded afterschool programs and adult community stakeholders, and the YIA Task Force, which worked to better NAZA and the Nashville community by generating ideas and working with the Committee on plans of action for implementation.

## ➤ 2020-2021

The YIA model continued to grow and become embedded in local afterschool programs. High school youth leaders continued to mentor middle schoolers, teach them about youth leadership and advocacy, and support mini-projects to impact their afterschool program. NAZA supported the YIA initiative by helping facilitate conversations with youth and coaching organizations on how to provide authentic leadership opportunities for youth.



## ➤ 2021-2022

Beginning this year, NAZA was able to distribute grant funding provided by the Institute of Museum & Library Services and Every Hour Counts to 4 organizations to implement 7 youth-led projects. High school leaders met with middle school youth to support them in planning and implementing projects in their schools and communities.

## ➤ 2022-2023

Participation continued to expand, and 6 organizations received funding for 9 youth-led projects. Youth leaders also began to gather national recognition and were invited to present at national conferences and participate in nationwide initiatives. A team of youth participated in Every Hour Count's Powered By Youth Voice cohort, engaging in a nationwide research project to reimagine afterschool centered around youth voice. Youth also created and planned the first annual Youth Matters Gala & Showcase, held at the Main Library in June 2023, to celebrate youth leadership, advocacy, and community service.

## ➤ 2023-2024

Youth participants from 10 organizations implemented 17 community projects, more than twice as many as in 2021-2022. The second annual Youth Matters Gala & Showcase was held at the Southeast Community Center in May 2024.



# Youth-Led Projects > 2021-2022

## Y-Quest @ Northwest Family YMCA (Creswell Middle School)

Youth led a clean-up of the courtyard and created a community garden at I.T. Creswell Middle School. They researched native plants, designed a blueprint for the garden, and built gardening beds and benches that double as desks for an outdoor classroom space.



## DYMON @ H.G. Hill Middle School

Youth collected donations for homeless individuals at Nashville Rescue Mission and made cards and bracelets for the youth they serve. They also worked together with another afterschool program to cook hot meals for residents of an LGBTQ+ youth group home and other unhoused individuals.

## Aspiring Youth Enrichment Services (AYES) @ H.G. Hill Middle School

The youth in this program partnered with the DYMON program to cook hot meals for residents of an LGBTQ+ youth group home and other unhoused individuals.





# Youth-Led Projects > 2021-2022

## Y-Quest @ DuPont Tyler Middle School

Youth researched the effect of littering on the environment and made a goal to protect sea animals from trash. They taught the students at Tulip Grove Elementary about recycling and collaborated with them to make artwork for the school out of recycled materials.

## DYMON @ Madison Middle School

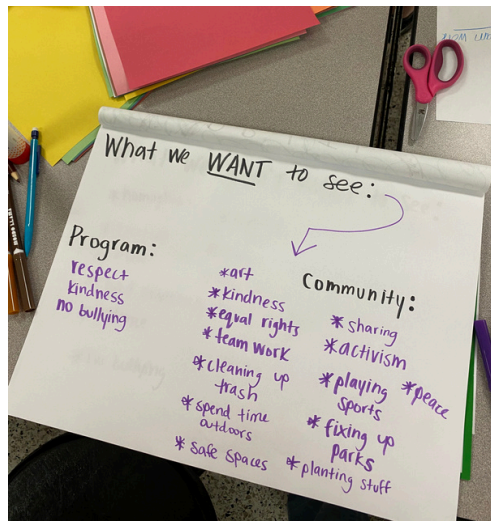
Program youth split into two groups to work on projects that bring youth together to discuss important topics. The first group created an activity on respect, kindness, and teaching younger kids how to share their feelings. The second group designed an activity to teach kids about safety and trust. Both groups implemented their activities with a local youth group.

## Y-Quest @ East Middle School

Participants tackled the problem of stress and how the COVID-19 pandemic created a more stressful environment. They hosted an event where they led activities to educate guests on how they can reduce stress and handle stressful moments.

## Nations Ministry Center @ McMurray Middle School

Youth decorated a bench for their school with designs that showcased their different cultures.



# Youth-Led Projects > 2022-2023

## Nations Ministry Center @ Croft Middle School

The students decided to improve their school by sharing their voices and held a town hall with teachers to share the experience of being a multilingual student. During the town hall, teachers and staff enjoyed the food the students selected from their cultures while listening to speeches the students had prepared. Attendees collaborated on solutions to problems such as supporting student voices and parent engagement.

## Y-Quest @ Northwest Family YMCA (Creswell Middle School)

Students noticed bullying as an issue within their school/community culture. In order to address this issue, they felt it was important to inspire self-love first, then appreciation for others. They worked with a builder to design their own affirmation box houses and painted them with their program's colors. They stocked the boxes with handmade affirmation cards, along with empty paper and pens for others to do the same, in a "take one, leave one" model.

## Y-Quest @ East Middle School

Youth organized a donation drive for their school community to collect shoes for those in need. They also held a community event at the end of their donation campaign where youth, parents and families, and members of the school community learned about the issue and how to help.

## Aspiring Youth Enrichment Services (AYES)

Youth Community Leaders (YCLs) worked with all of the AYES programs on financial literacy and planning. AYES was simultaneously working on a youth-focused financial literacy workshop for the community. The YCLs worked with CareerLife on best practices for working as a team and event planning. Youth ultimately decided to plan a community fish fry event.

## DYMON @ Robert Churchwell Elementary School

The students created a letter-writing campaign to focus on spreading positivity and wrote to various groups, such as youth battling illnesses and their school community members. They also organized an art show as they wrote about the power of art and why art is important to them.





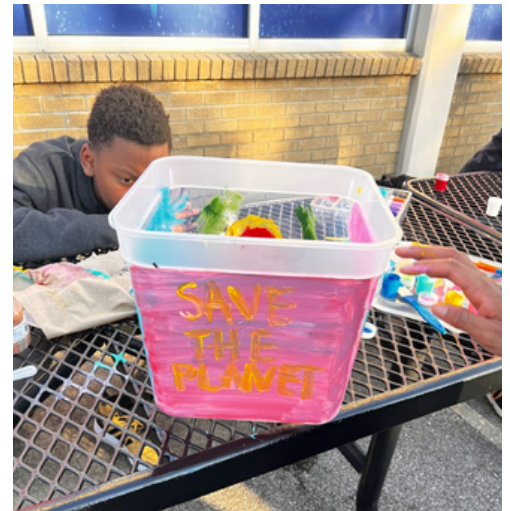
# Youth-Led Projects > 2022-2023

## DYMON @ H.G. Hill Middle School

The students organized a trash pick-up/campus clean-up day around Earth Day. They began the clean-up at H.G. Hill Middle and ended at Hillwood High School. For their second project, the youth organized a cultural night at their school. They chose this because their program and school is made up of students from many different cultures. The youth were able to share their own culture, or pick a different country to learn about and share. Lastly, students held a donation drive for Nashville Rescue Mission. During the donation period, they made daily announcements to educate their peers about the need. They received many donations and incentivized their peers with a pizza/ice cream party for the class with the most donations.

## Moves & Grooves @ Margaret Allen Middle

Youth found that it was important to spread kindness to improve mental health. They wanted to start by teaching younger students these values. The Moves & Grooves youth partnered up with a local church's tutoring program to lead activities and conversations about kindness.



## Backfield in Motion @ Rose Park Middle School

Youth worked with their school to incorporate recycling. After talking to their principal, the students made a plan for the program to take initiative on recycling each week. They then designed and painted recycling bins for the classrooms.

## DYMON @ Haynes Middle School

The first project the youth at Haynes worked on focused on school and career exploration. Students organized a field trip to tour Hillsboro High School, where they learned about the many jobs inside a school. They also got to chat with current high school students and staff to learn about MNPS academies and ask questions about the high school experience. For their second project, youth taught their peers about hygiene and organized a hygiene supply drive for the MNPS H.E.R.O. program, which supports families experiencing homelessness.

# Youth-Led Projects > 2023-2024

## Nations Ministry Center @ McMurray Middle School

Students hosted a community Field Day, which included a bouncy house, soccer tournament, art station, and food. They also worked to provide multilingual books for their school library.

## Nations Ministry Center @ LEAD Southeast

The youth at LEAD Southeast designed and led a cultural immersion event titled "Around the World" for families and teachers. The event featured interactive presentations showcasing the cultural diversity of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Guests engaged with table displays, sampled cultural foods, learned games, participated in crafts, and enjoyed authentic decorations. The event concluded with a traditional Arabic dance, fostering community and cultural appreciation.



## Bethlehem Centers of Nashville

Youth created and distributed "Having a Heart for Others/Caring for Nashville" Care Bags, which included cards of inspiration, hygiene products, and shelf-stable foods, to Nashville's homeless community.

## Global Outreach Developments International @ DuPont Tyler

Youth were motivated by a bullying incident at their school and chose to delve into understanding bullying dynamics and acquiring skills to defuse such situations. The youth then scripted and performed in an anti-bullying video, which received over 1,800 views.

## Rocklife Youth

Students let their creativity flow by working on a semester-long film project. Students created a short film to showcase their vision and premiered it at a community screening.



# Youth-Led Projects > 2023-2024

## Y-Quest @ Northwest Family YMCA (Creswell Middle School)

Youth created a campaign to help animals find their forever home! Students researched needs of local shelters and partnered with the Nashville Humane Association to spread information and collect needed items like food and blankets.

## An Array of Charm (AOC) Camps

Older students worked on a curriculum to teach younger students how to play various instruments throughout their year of programming. Students showcased their musical talents in a performance at a community event at the end of the year. For their second project, the youth held a "pop-up" shop, where they offered community members in need a traditional shopping experience - without having to pay. Shoppers were able to collect hygiene and self-care items along with inspirational crafts handmade by the youth.

## Martha O'Bryan Center

Youth collaborated with Room in the Inn to lead an evening of fellowship, food, and gifting care packages, with a special focus on self-care. Youth visited with residents, led activities, and served dinner.

## Beech Creek Ministries

Youth worked on a yearlong art project with local artist Omari Booker. They met weekly to start a mural project from scratch: discussing how art can impact a community, brainstorming ideas, making blueprints and budgeting, and ultimately painting their mural alongside Mr. Booker. At their final end-of-year showcase, a second group of students led an art wellness event for families and community members. They led activities and shared the power of art within mindfulness. They also used this time to unveil their mural and recap video.



# Youth-Led Projects > 2023-2024

## DYMON @ Haynes Middle School

Students at Haynes split to lead 3 projects this year. The first group hosted a Teacher Appreciation Week at their school, offering free food and wellness activities for teachers. A second group created gift baskets, friendship bracelets, and letters to support youth with terminal illnesses at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. The third group created gift and activity baskets for residents in a nearby elder care facility, containing comforting and engaging items such as fuzzy socks, crossword puzzle books, and handwritten affirmation cards.

## DYMON @ H.G. Hills Middle School

DYMON youth at H.G. Hill led a project to support young single moms in Nashville. They worked with a local organization to organize an end-of-year Mother's Day appreciation event. Youth led a fun photoshoot for the moms and their children, served warm meals, and led activities for self-love for the mothers. They also collected a sizable amount of donations that supplied a free shop for mothers to fulfill their needs.

## DYMON @ Madison Middle School

The youth hosted a school community-building event for teachers and administrative staff to enjoy free food and wellness activities. Students took a class on flower design and made bouquets to share with staff and their families. They also held space for conversations about how students and staff can better support each other.

## Youth Changes

Youth in this program organized a Spring Day that provided free food and activities for their community. They had a pop-up shop where families could access free resources and items, and also offered free braiding certification classes to help people get their businesses started.

## Y-Quest @ Y-CAP (East Middle School)

Youth chose to make blankets for mothers and babies. They also collected items to donate to Hope Clinic for Women along with the blankets.





# Conferences

## ➤ FEBRUARY 2020

NAZA's Youth Advisor, Allie Duke, spoke at the TN Conference on Volunteerism and Service-Learning. She gave the opening Welcome speech for the Student Track sessions, which featured workshops for middle school, high school, and college students, planned by their fellow students.

## ➤ SEPTEMBER 2022

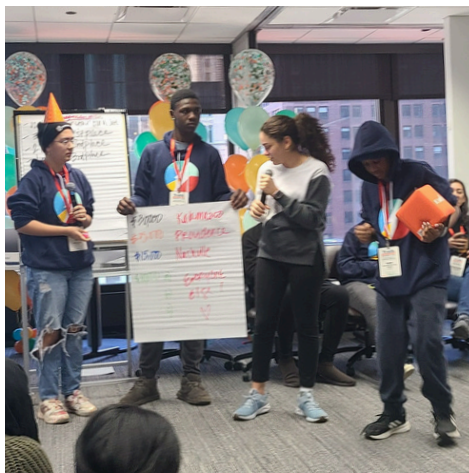
Four youth leaders attended the 50 State Afterschool Network Meeting in Washington, D.C. The youth leaders spoke about integrating youth voices and youth leadership in afterschool programs to approximately 400 representatives from all 50 states. Attendees included U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten and 2022 National Youth Poet Laureate Alyssa Gaines, as well as representatives from the Mott Foundation, Every Hour Counts, Youthprise, local and national non-profit organizations, and school districts throughout the country.

## ➤ DECEMBER 2022

Nine youth traveled to Chicago, IL for a national convening of youth leaders and youth development professionals hosted by Every Hour Counts in partnership with Youthprise and Greentrike. The Youth Powered Conference brought youth leaders from 6 cities to Chicago to discuss the future of afterschool programs and submit proposals for grant funding from Every Hour Counts.

The Nashville's team proposal was the culmination of 7 months of work by the youth team on how youth want to reimagine afterschool. The youth leaders did extensive research and work in the community to create a proposal to enhance and build upon programs in Nashville. Their proposal focused on youth leadership, life skills, and peer-based school support.

The six youth teams voted on how to distribute the grant funds, and Nashville's proposal was awarded 3rd place, securing a \$15,000 grant for the implementation of their project.



## ➤ MAY 2023

Along with staff from NAZA and partner organization Why We Can't Wait, a youth leader traveled to West Palm Beach, FL for the Every Hour Counts Conference to lead a workshop on how to create true youth leadership opportunities.

## ➤ JULY 2023

Two youth traveled to Washington, D.C. for the National Summer Learning Association's National Youth Leadership Institute to participate in the "Engage Every Student" workshop and in a panel discussion with the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education.



## ➤ FEBRUARY 2024

A youth leader traveled once again to Washington, D.C. for the Biden-Harris Administration's Interagency Youth Policy Summit: Cultivating Possibilities. The conference brought together nearly 90 youth and members of several agencies including the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice to engage in discussion around the issues that affect young people and how federal policies and programs can support youth and create conditions where they can thrive.

## ➤ MARCH 2024

Four youth leaders took the stage as the opening panel for NAZA's Learn, Engage, Develop! (L.E.D.) Conference for Out-of-School Time Professionals. Youth also led an interactive workshop, "Youth-Led, Adult Supported: Empowering Youth Leadership" at the conference.



# Community Events

## ➤ MAY 2020

NAZA's *Youth in Action!* cohort led an end-of-year showcase that celebrated their inaugural year's work and facilitated a dynamic discussion on youth voice. During the event, they celebrated accomplishments, including YIA's engagement of 256 middle school youth in NAZA-funded programs in 2019-2020. Youth leaders also posed open questions for discussion around how adults can best support and remove barriers for youth in Nashville.

## ➤ OCTOBER 2020

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a team of youth in various NAZA-funded programs came together with YIA students to offer an interactive webinar "NAZA Kids Got Talent" for all ages, to teach fun activities you can do at home. Youth demonstrated activities including sewing, cooking, physical movement, hairstyling, gaming, and sketching. Participants followed along in real time and left with tips on how to stay connected during a pandemic.

## ➤ JUNE 2023

More than 100 youth and adults gathered for the 1st Annual Youth Matters Gala & Showcase. The event was created by the youth leaders to showcase their work over the past year and provide a space for youth and adults to support and learn from each other. It featured live music from a band of local youth, a gallery showcasing youth artwork and highlights of youth-led community projects, and interactive activities. Adult participants learned about how they can better support youth by incorporating youth voice and youth leadership in decision-making.



## ➤ DECEMBER 2023

YIA members organized a "Holidays at Hadley" event for the community to come together, offering resources and fun for the whole family. Students led arts & crafts activities, games, a cake walk, holiday movies, and served free food. They also held a resource fair where people could get free flu shots, find out about assistance programs, and more. There was also a donation drive of baby items to support single mothers.

## ➤ MAY 2024

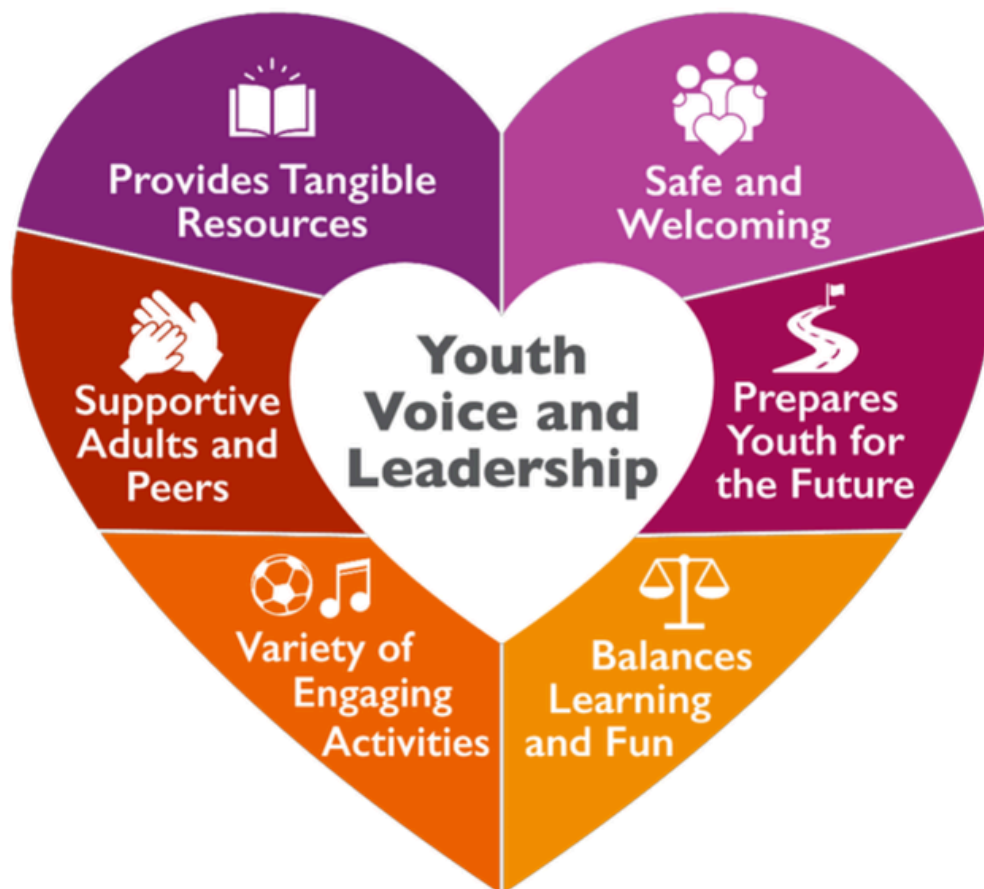
The community joined youth leaders once again for the 2nd Annual Youth Matters Gala & Showcase.

# Powered by Youth Voice > 2022-2024

The Powered By Youth Voice (PBYV) cohort was a collaborative research team whose goal was to reimagine afterschool time by engaging youth voices and promoting equitable relationships between youth and adult leaders. Led by Every Hour Counts in partnership with Youthprise, the PBYV initiative aimed to empower young people as co-creators and designers of solutions to issues impacting their peers and communities and offer meaningful opportunities for youth to transform programs and systems intended to serve them.

Nashville was one of six cities to participate in the nationwide research project. The Nashville cohort was made up of 10 youth aged 12-19. Data was collected from 1,087 youth surveys nationwide, with over 200 survey results collected by the Nashville cohort. The Nashville cohort also collected feedback given by youth and their parents over the course of 5 Listening Sessions throughout the 2022-2023 year.

Research questions included what activities youth find meaningful in their current afterschool programs, what is missing from afterschool programs, and how afterschool programs could be more meaningful for youth. Key findings from the yearlong research emphasized the need for youth leadership, life skills development, and more engaging tutoring programs.





# Powered by Youth Voice > 2022-2024

The Nashville PBYV cohort developed a plan to implement their findings in 2023-2024 with 5 key strategies:

- Community town halls to strengthen youth-adult partnerships
- Youth-created training programs for youth development professionals
- Mini-grant funding for youth-led projects
- Partnering with youth development professionals to organize community events with the city's leadership
- Creating life skills workshops for Nashville youth

Youth traveled to Chicago in December 2022 to present their plan and compete for grant funding to implement their ideas. Their proposal took third place, securing \$15,000 to implement their vision.





# Community Engagement

## Alignment Nashville Student Voice A-Team

The Student Voice A-Team was created by Alignment Nashville to improve student voice and engagement throughout Metro Nashville Public Schools by leveraging existing structures and creating and adapting tools. Three YIA members participated in the A-Team, bringing youth voice to meetings with MNPS and participating in research projects. During the 2023-24 school year, the Student Voice A-Team completed its pilot at Margaret Allen Middle School, while supporting a district-wide Student Voice Campaign and creating a Student Voice Playbook for expansion and sustainability.

## Mayor's Task Force for Career Exploration

Twelve YIA representatives participated in the Mayor's Task Force for Career Exploration. The Task Force's aim is to develop a strategy and a business plan on how to expand youth career exploration and align youth opportunities in Nashville/Davidson County. Youth participated in focus groups, led discussions, and contributed to the production of a final report. Three of the YIA representatives helped present the Task Force's findings to Mayor Cooper and other key stakeholders.



## PENCIL

YIA representatives met with PENCIL in 2020 and co-hosted a student listening session for MNPS students during the COVID-19 shutdown. More than 200 youth participated. In 2021, YIA co-hosted the MNPS Partnership Symposium. A Youth Community Leader, Avery, represented MNPS at the PENCIL Board of Directors meeting in April of 2021, helping plan and lead alongside fellow MNPS student leaders. Avery shared about her experience working with NAZA and YIA.



# Community Engagement

## Nashville's Vision for Holistic Youth Development

*Youth In Action!* and youth leaders played a key role in the development of [Nashville's Vision for Holistic Youth Development](#). NAZA's Youth Advisor, Allie, was one of the core committee members when the initial work to create the Vision was begun in 2019. Additional youth were onboarded and participated in cohort meetings. The youth helped revise Vision materials to use more youth-friendly language, gave feedback on visuals, and helped draft the initial concept for representing the Vision as a tree. Youth also hosted and led the meeting to unveil the newly-created Vision in fall of 2020.



Moving into the implementation phase of the project, youth helped create materials including informational sheets to help their fellow youth understand the individual growth practices and instructions for activities youth can do to help them develop these skills.

Youth Leadership was chosen as one of the community growth practices for the Vision, and since its launch YIA participants have been helping create conditions for their fellow youth to develop leadership skills and take on leadership roles.

## The Power of Young People Podcast

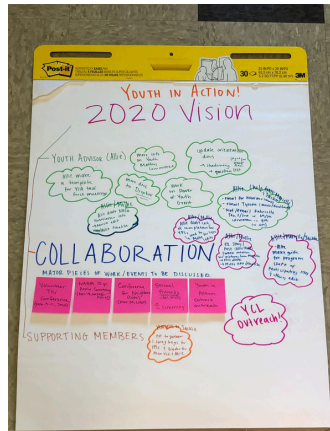
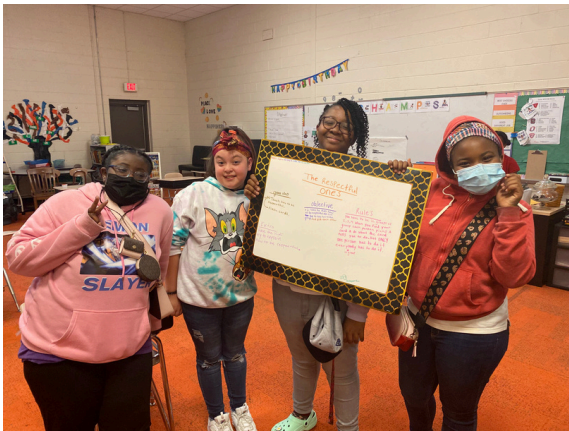
YIA Coordinator Allie and Youth Community Leaders Neema, Aiden, and Itzel starred on an episode of the National Youth Leadership Council's Podcast, the Power of Young People. They discussed why and how YIA was created, the hurdles they've overcome, and the impact they've had on the community. They gave listeners insight into how to amplify youth voices and co-create opportunities for youth leadership and meaningful involvement.

# Looking Ahead

The next chapter of *Youth In Action!* will focus on expanding the program's sustainability and impact while continuing to amplify youth leadership. We are excited to embark on several key initiatives, including a research project supported by a group of national funders examining how gentrification and displacement impact youths' access to housing, education, and developmental opportunities in Nashville. This youth-led initiative will engage middle school communities to raise awareness and recommend actionable pathways for change, focusing on the Antioch area of Nashville. We are currently setting up a collaboration with Lipscomb University's College of Education to help evaluate the gaps and achievements of the YIA initiative so that we can build a stronger sustainability plan as we move on to the next 5 years of implementation.

Alongside these efforts, YIA remains committed to supporting youth-led projects within local communities, offering mentorship, seeking grant funding, and creating opportunities for middle and high school students to lead initiatives that matter to them. We will also expand training opportunities for youth development professionals to help them foster environments where young leaders can thrive.

These projects underscore our commitment to ensuring that youth voices remain at the center of systemic change. As we look to the future, we envision Nashville as a city where young people are empowered not only to advocate for themselves, but also to inspire transformational change. Together, we can create a stronger, more equitable Nashville - one project, one voice, one leader at a time.





# Acknowledgements

## ➤ YOUTH COMMUNITY LEADERS

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Institute of Museum and Library Services  
Seeking Common Ground  
Wallace Foundation

## ➤ NAZA-FUNDED PARTNERS

AAOC Camps for Youth Development  
Aspiring Youth Enrichment Services  
Backfield in Motion  
Beech Creek Ministries  
Bethlehem Centers  
DYMON  
G.O.D. International  
Martha O'Bryan  
Metro Parks & Recreation  
Moves and Grooves  
Nations Ministry Center  
Rocklife Youth  
Why We Can't Wait  
Youth Changes  
YMCA of Middle TN

## ➤ COLLABORATORS & SUPPORTERS

Alignment Nashville  
Omari Booker  
Buns on the Run  
CareerLife  
Mayor John Cooper  
Mayor's Youth Council  
Metro Nashville Public Schools  
Nashville Public Library Foundation  
Nashville Soccer Club  
Nashville Tools for Schools  
National Youth Leadership Council  
Neighbor 2 Neighbor  
Oasis Center  
POWER Youth  
Bernardo & Ely Ramirez  
Turnip Green  
YouthPrise

