



Our Work in Education Justice

Through the Education Justice Initiative (EJI), Youth in Focus supports youth voice and engagement in action research and evaluation on youth-identified education issues. The EJI promotes leadership development and youth and adult partnerships in decision-making across community-based organizations, alliances and networks, and Bay Area schools and districts. The Education Justice Initiative also works strategically with organizations to develop action plans to link youth-led action research and evaluation to local action and networks working towards access, equity and change.

In this newsletter, we describe our work with three of our Education Justice Projects in **Oakland, Berkeley** and **Sacramento!**



In This Issue:

Education Justice Initiative

Page 2
**Oakland Unified School
District**

Page 3
Project WHAT!

Page 4
**American Legion
Continuation High
School**

Bay Area Office
1611 Telegraph Ave., Ste. 510
Oakland, CA 94612
T: 510.251.9800
F: 510.251.9810

Central Valley Office
2010 Del Paso Blvd.
P.O. Box 13529
Sacramento, CA 95815
T: 916.923.3612
F: 866.552.9957

MISSION

Youth In Focus educates underrepresented youth and adult partners in youth-led action research, evaluation and planning (Y-REP) to create conditions for social change.

USE YOUR VOICE:

Oakland Unified School District Student-led Evaluation Project Promotes Meaningful Youth Engagement

For the past two years, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has administered a community-wide assessment survey, Use Your Voice, which seeks input from parents, teachers and administrators about the state of the schools. This information is collected and helps to inform district decision-making to continually improve the public school system in Oakland.

Last year, the district expanded the target audience of Use Your Voice to survey students. The district collected over 7,000 surveys from high school students; however, the surveys did not provide enough information about specific strategies to use to bolster student participation and engagement. After conferring with YIF, officials at the central school district agreed that partnering with Youth in Focus to train a group of youth-researchers to conduct focus groups with other students would help the district better meet the needs of secondary students in Oakland.

Every week from February to June, students and the Youth in Focus Senior Program Manager for the Educational Justice Initiative, Dana Wright, and Kate Miffitt, the liaison from OUSD, conduct student trainings to prepare the research team to conduct focus groups, interpret data results and ultimately publish and present their findings to OUSD decision-makers and the public. The student identified research question is, "How can we increase student leadership and ensure equality in OUSD?"

After reviewing and analyzing the Use Your Voice survey results, the team facilitated four student focus groups to gather student input on student leadership and engagement. The youth evaluation team analyzed their focus group data and developed findings and recommendations to address student concerns with a series of proactive next steps. The students have created a final report and presentation with their research findings and recommendations to present to the school district and school leaders. The student evaluators also created a workshop for high school Leadership classes to be facilitated by students and Leadership teachers to help students take a leadership role in a school-wide project to improve their schools.

The ultimate goal of the project is to create an action plan to help OUSD high schools inform their school-site planning from a student perspective. One of the youth researchers, Janelle Johnson, a high school senior, explained the benefits of her participation in the project, "Being in this student research team has helped me become a step closer to reaching my full potential and is helping me to make a difference in the school communities." This group of youth-researchers is committed to increase student engagement and help support the district in their quest to make school meaningful for all high school students in the Oakland Unified School District.

**For further information, please visit:
<http://webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us/UseYourVoice.aspx>**





Project WHAT!:

What youth impacted by the incarceration of a parent truly need

Youth in Focus' Education Justice Initiative partnered with Project WHAT! to support their youth action research project aimed at improving services provided to young people with an incarcerated parent. A program of Community Works, Project WHAT! is a group of youth aged 15-20 from the Bay Area who are impacted by the incarceration of a parent. Approximately 2.4 million children in the nation have a parent in prison and jail. Project WHAT! recently succeeded in reaching its three project goals. First, they created a final report with their findings and recommendations from their action research project. Second, the team created a youth-led training curriculum for social workers and teachers to improve their services to youth with an incarcerated parent. The training curriculum for service providers will be facilitated by youth team members and will also use Theatre of the Oppressed activities to communicate their recommendations to social workers and teachers. Third, the team created a resource guide for young people who have a parent in prison or jail. The resource guide includes an audio CD of the young people's creative writing stories.



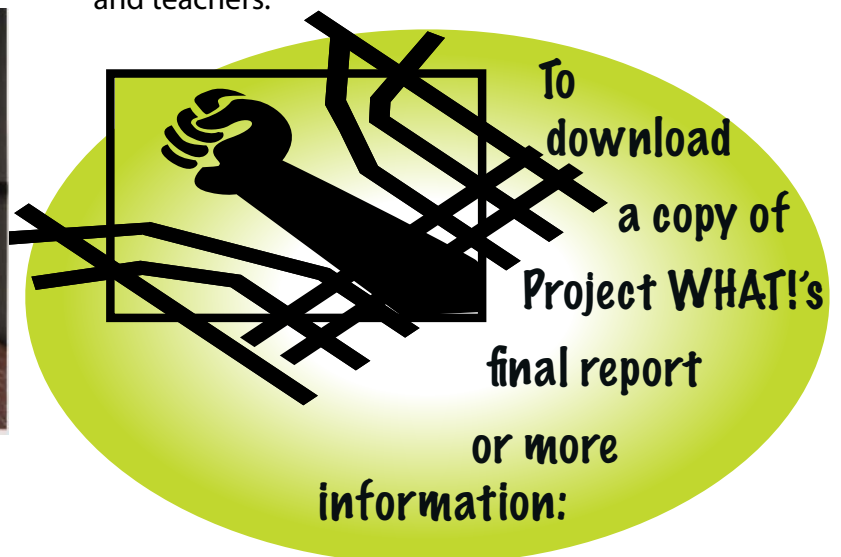
The team of youth at Project WHAT! along with Anna Wong (right), Program and Policy Director of Project WHAT!

Project WHAT's research question is: "How can the services provided to youth with incarcerated parents be improved?" The youth researchers collected over 150 surveys from teachers, social workers and other service providers. Project WHAT! also conducted focus groups with social workers, teachers and youth with an incarcerated parent. After analyzing all of this information and coming up with their findings and recommendations, Project WHAT created their final report summarizing their research.

Youth in Focus is continuing to work with Project WHAT! in its second year to train the team of youth trainers to facilitate trainings with social workers and teachers.



Project WHAT! youth and Anna Wong



Youth for Action:

American Legion Continuation High School Student-led Action Research Project Fosters Crucial Changes



Located within Sacramento's Oak Park community, American Legion Continuation High School faces a number of challenges, including lack of adequate career and college preparation and even the necessary coursework to pursue higher education. As a continuation school, American Legion faces entrenched stigma about who its students are and what they can do. The Youth Congress student organization at American Legion is taking action by running a youth-led action research project with Youth In Focus.

In the fall of 2006, YIF's newly recruited Central Valley hire, Jesus S. Sanchez, approached American Legion High School's counselor, Mary Horton to develop a youth-led action research project to help facilitate student's actions in revolutionizing their current state of education. With much concern, compassion, and various meetings with "Ms. Mary," as referred to by her students, Jesus worked with the brilliant Youth Congress team to begin identifying issues they felt were important to look at in order to create change within the continuation school experience. Youth highlighted a lack of funding, lack of programs, no school activities, lack of outreach from institutions of higher learning, lack of materials and no after school programs as issues they want to see addressed.

From these concerns came the strategic methods from which students and their allies designed the Youth REP project with YIF. After a great term of team building and skill development, students devised a survey that they would disseminate to their peers. In addition to working on research methods to create a stage for educational reform, students also worked with Youth In Focus to develop a network between American Legion and community colleges throughout Sacramento. Lucia Kimble, an undergraduate intern from UC Davis, has facilitated these early discussions to begin moving college access into American Legion, implementing a college immersion pilot program students had visualized.

While making great strides to keep the educational system accountable, Michael Ximenez, the elected student coordinator to YIF, made ground breaking history in becoming the first continuation school student to win the student seat on the Sacramento Unified School District as the student advisor to the district. Today, the Youth Congress team, also known as Jesus' Angels, has completed their survey and is in the phase of data analysis and developing strategies for action. We look forward to seeing them make students' recommendations for change a reality.

For more information on projects, please contact:



Youth In Focus

Jesus Sanchez
Program Manager
Central Valley Initiative

2010 Del Paso Blvd. • Sacramento, CA 95815
T 916.923.3612 • F 916.532.9957
jesus@youthinfocus.net • www.youthinfocus.net



Youth In Focus

Dana Wright
Senior Program Manager
Education Justice Initiative

1611 Telegraph Ave. #510 • Oakland, CA 94612
T 510.251.9800 ext. 304 • F 510.251.9810
dana@youthinfocus.net • www.youthinfocus.net