



**CENTER FOR  
CITIES+SCHOOLS**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY

Changing Cities  
For and With Young People

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

*A glimpse behind the scenes at the team that has shaped and been shaped by 20 years of Y-PLAN*



Dear Y-PLAN Community:

I was cloistered away in Moffitt Library working on my dissertation on a sunny, spring afternoon when I got a call that would change the next 20 years of my life. I was asked to speak to the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) practicum class on how urban planning students, interested in working with local schools, could do so more effectively. When I gave the talk the following week, I was inspired by the students' passion, yet frustrated that this appeared to be such an impossible task. **Why was it so difficult to bring together urban planning and public schooling when these fields had so many shared interests, goals, and people at their heart?**

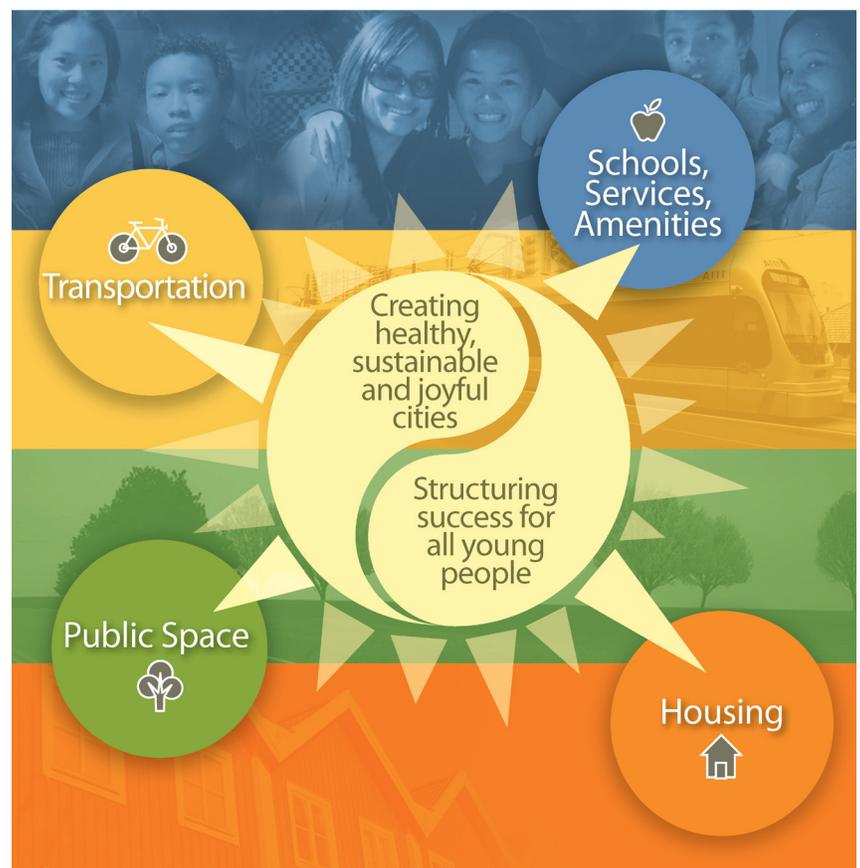
Prior to my education policy studies at Cal, I had spent over 10 years working on urban poverty, public housing, and community development in cities from Brooklyn, NY to Mumbai, India. From project to project, one segment of the population stood out as the most insightful yet least recognized constituency: young people. This disparity is what pushed me to study education policy at Berkeley - despite my own personal struggles with formal schooling. After this talk, and reflecting on many years in the field, I was confronted by haunting questions:

*Isn't it time to change all this? Isn't it time city planners learned more about public schools and public schools more about city planning?*

So I proposed a new interdisciplinary course to the Deans of City Planning and Education who, while skeptical of student interest, recognized the importance of this for both fields. **Thus, the CP 290/Ed190 Y-PLAN Studio was born, inspiring a generation of over 500 UC Berkeley students, hundreds of educators and city planners, and over 10,000 young people to co-construct a global civic learning initiative.** Together, we recognized the power of creating safe spaces for young people to ask **WHY?**

**Why is one city street so much more dangerous than another?**

**Why don't all young people have access to good schools, healthy food, and affordable housing?**



This course became the springboard for the Y-PLAN Civic Learning Initiative - and continues to be an important space to bring people together and to inform Y-PLAN initiatives across the globe. Even today - as we pivot in this 20th year to online education - **this course offers a learning lab, generating innovative new digital tools and strategic insights that are already informing projects across California and beyond.**

Y-PLAN also led to the founding of the Center for Cities + Schools in 2004, in partnership with Dr. Jeff Vincent, to deepen the interdisciplinary policy focus to address systemic and deep inequities across our communities --- driven from insights and understanding from young people's everyday life and lived experiences.

This Y-PLAN @ 20 Reflection Series shares inspiring insights from past alumni and partners, ultimately answering the question: "why Y-PLAN?".

*"I am confident that we will persevere, continuing this important work of transforming communities to be far more equitable, resilient and joyful places for everyone -- for and with young people."*

Together we have formed a powerful, intergenerational community of practice that crosses disciplinary and geographic boundaries and borders that span 20 years. We have already learned so much - and I am confident that we will persevere, continuing this important work of transforming communities to be far more equitable, resilient and joyful places for everyone -- for and with young people. **I am so grateful for the brilliant and inspiring voices you will hear from in this Y-PLAN @20 reflection series and more articles and voices that will follow throughout 2020.**



Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deborah J. McKay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

### **DID YOU KNOW...**

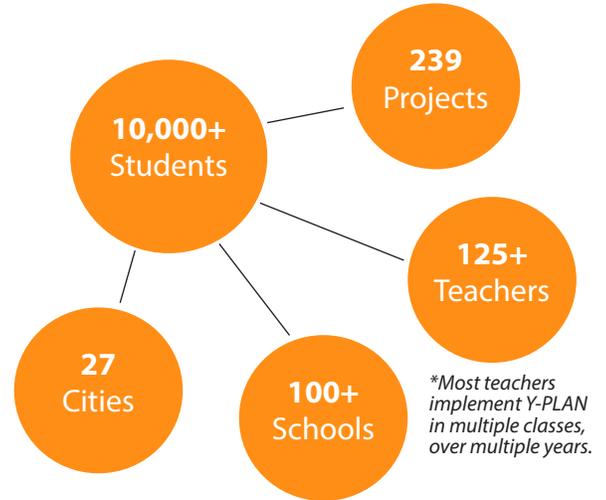
**500+ UC BERKELEY GRADUATE & UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS HAVE MENTORED 1,000+ K-12 STUDENTS OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS WITH THE UCB Y-PLAN SEMINAR.**



*“Y-PLAN turns schools inside out:  
communities become the text for learning  
and young people become agents of social change.”*

Started in 2000 at the University of California, Berkeley, Y-PLAN (Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now!) is a unique model for authentic, civic learning partnering high school students with civic leaders to collaboratively tackle our cities’ biggest challenges.

As students identify problems where they live and engage with civic leaders to address these challenges, they become more prepared for college, careers, and civic life. Y-PLAN has engaged thousands of young people and hundreds of schools, teachers, and civic partners across the United States and around the globe.



# Y-PLAN Roadmap



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### **DID YOU KNOW...**

**Y-PLAN HAS WON THE UC CHANCELLOR’S AWARD FOR PUBLIC SERVICE FIVE TIMES: 2001, 2005, 2009, 2012, AND 2018.**



## “Growing Together”

8

by Amanda Eppley, Associate Director, Center for Cities + Schools

***“For the bridge across the generations is essential to the nation in the present; and more, it is the bridge to our own future -- and thus in a central sense, to the very meaning of our own lives. Whatever their differences with us, whatever the depth of their dissent, it is vital for us as much as for them that our young feel that change is possible, that they will be heard, that the follies and cruelties of the world will yield, however grudgingly, to the sacrifices they are prepared to make. Above all, we seek a sense of possibility.”<sup>1</sup>***

I first read those words by Bobby Kennedy when I was in high school, at a time when the bumper sticker on my car read **“If the people lead, eventually the leaders will follow.”** Decades later, I marvel at the resonance of both. Perhaps resulting from my early readings of such works, it has seemed obvious to me for as long as I can remember that cities and schools depend on each other, that neither will be improved without the other, and that solutions lie in the bridges spanning divisions across age, race, and socio-economic status. Still, even after studying the reciprocal relationship between communities and formal and informal education throughout college, I entered UC Berkeley’s masters program in city planning desperate to find anyone else working at that intersection. Although the Center for Cities + Schools did not yet exist, I luckily found the one individual in Wurster Hall who was investigating those very questions: Professor Deborah McKoy. I took her spring seminar, implementing a Y-PLAN project at McClymonds High School in West Oakland, as well as another course conducting research to bridge gaps between Galileo High School and its San Francisco neighborhood, and I worked for her as a consultant throughout my graduate student years.

While reading an article for one of Deb’s courses, I grew increasingly frustrated that the author - who was pontificating about everything wrong with public schools - had never even taught in one. My frustration turned quickly to anger, and led to the realization that my current trajectory mirrored that of the author, as I had begun applying to PhD programs to continue my journey. I promptly shifted course, ceased my doctoral applications, and applied instead to teaching positions. The following fall, in a fortuitous turn of events, I was consolidated from my first Oakland public middle school, one that was shuttered the next year, because they had mistakenly hired too many teachers, and I landed at Frick Middle School in East Oakland.

***“I owe my eventual success to the steady mentorship of several key teachers, coaches, and administrators, the insights of thirteen year olds, and my ability to craft my classroom from the expertise of each, much like the communities of practice cultivated in Y-PLAN to this day.”***

At Frick, I was surrounded by the best educators and most impressive young people I have ever met. They welcomed me and supported me, and the only path to failure would have been to ignore the wisdom of the young people and adults alike with whom I spent my days. Of course, as a first year teacher, I struggled plenty, and I owe my eventual success to the steady mentorship of several key teachers, coaches, and administrators, the insights of thirteen year olds, and my ability to craft my classroom from the expertise of each, much like the communities of practice cultivated in Y-PLAN to this day.

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1 Kennedy, Robert F. (1967). *To Seek a Newer World*. New York, NY: Doubleday. p. 15.

I started at Frick in October, so I took over classes being taught by substitutes. Exacerbated the challenges inherent to any first year of teaching, I inherited no assignments or grades for my students. In November, under the patient guidance of my then assistant principal, Jerome Gourdine, **I accomplished the once unimaginable: I convinced my students to stay in their seats while I was teaching.** This took almost a herculean effort. While observing a class at my request, Gourdine identified that as the first step needed to achieve any real classroom management, and advised me to send him any student out of his or her seat without permission to help accomplish it. I think I sent three quarters of my first period class to him the next morning. During that one hour block, as I shifted from filling out referral forms to scribbling on sticky notes at his instruction, his backing and support afforded me the authority to succeed, and after one painstaking day, I had won that battle. **Now that my students were in their seats, my next goal would be to get them to listen.**

It was in that time that my seventh graders read the play "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street." As we finished, I cautiously initiated a class discussion, and one seventh grader yelled over the loud chatter in the room. "You know what we need in here, Ms. Eppley?"

"What's that?" I hollered back.

"A tornado."

I assumed he was mocking me, but at least his discussion was somewhat on topic, so I probed, asking him why. The student proceeded to explain that in the short play the neighbors who didn't know each other were forced to come together to fight a common enemy (the monsters), and when they did, they realized they weren't all that different from each other and that they got more done when they worked together.

**"If a tornado hit, we'd be locked in this classroom, and then we'd have no choice but to work together,"** he explained. **"And then maybe we could get something done in here."**

*"By helping people realize they're allies, not adversaries, we can accomplish so much more. We can build those bridges that Bobby Kennedy told me years before were essential 'to seek a newer world.'"*

The bell rang, and as I reflected on his brilliance, I realized the beauty of Y-PLAN more than I had the previous spring. By helping people realize they're allies, not adversaries, we can accomplish so much more. We can build those bridges that Bobby Kennedy told me years before were essential "to seek a newer world." I also realized the power of young people in a new way, one that would be reinforced throughout my years teaching, as students wrote essays shining light on the beauty around them as well as the problems, as they challenged the textbook content on the Mexican American war because their parents' books from Mexico portrayed the history differently, and as they stepped up to lead class discussions about the murder of a classmate's brother. **The depth of their lived experiences in those areas far surpassed mine.**

When we hold the space and genuinely listen, young people will teach us how to learn from and with each other, to find that sense of possibility we seek.

During my years at Frick, I learned more from my students and peers than I could have imparted, though by any measure I did become a successful teacher. Family obligations eventually brought me to my small hometown in Massachusetts and then to Honolulu before I returned to Berkeley. **Again, I scanned the landscape for people and organizations seeking to bridge the gaps between cities and schools, and again my search yielded one result.** Since I left, Deb had started the Center for Cities + Schools, and had scaled Y-PLAN from that one class at McClymonds into a global initiative. When I reconnected with Deb and Y-PLAN in 2015, I brought a decade of experience teaching in small and large, urban and small town, public middle and high schools across the country to a research center that had spent that time developing tools and taking action toward the goal I had sought all along. I eagerly joined, willing to do any work needed, which initially was to lead the NYC expansion and the development of a new website and data management system.

Still, my heart remained in Oakland, and although we had Y-PLAN projects there in 2015-16, my responsibilities were elsewhere. A year into this endeavor, my journey came full circle when Deb entrusted me with a new role, allowing me to cultivate Bay Area projects and partnerships. I had the opportunity to reconnect with Gourdine, who remained a crucial mentor during my tenure at Frick even as he became the principal. He was now managing the African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMA) in Oakland. We brainstormed potential alignment between Y-PLAN and AAMA, as old friends and colleagues catching up from a missed decade. Our excitement grew about the ways each initiative could bring out the best in the other. Each of us trusted the other to come through in the end, and to do whatever it took to ensure success.

*“...it allowed me to cultivate a Community of Practice with people I already knew were the best at what they did, and could be counted on to efficiently, effectively, and empathetically make things happen.”*

During the fall of 2016, we matched AAMA classes with a BART project that was similarly close to my heart, as it evolved through conversations with another friend whom I had known since college. This partnership not only marked my return to working in Oakland, but it allowed me to cultivate a Community of Practice with people I already knew were the best at what they did, and could be counted on to efficiently, effectively, and empathetically make things happen.

On the Sunday night after Thanksgiving, with the project set to kick off the next morning, I received an email from Gourdine explaining that a student had been killed during the break, and that students may not know or have had the chance to properly grieve. I responded immediately that we'd follow their lead, and could work out a new schedule, but that if they wanted, I'd still be there. The teacher said he'd love that, and Gourdine added that he'd be there, too.

The next morning marked the first time in a decade that I had been in an Oakland classroom, and I was there to introduce Y-PLAN to a group of young men who had just lost a teammate, a classmate, and a friend. **It was tragically familiar, but something I had long since left behind.** The principal announced a moment of silence over the loudspeaker. The teacher facilitated a class discussion. Gourdine broke up four fights in the hallway during that one class period. And in the flow of the day, I introduced the young men to the Y-PLAN, and our shared objective to propose recommendations for city change to the current leaders to help shape their community in the future.

Although the leaded curtain draped over that morning was unmistakable, I had no idea at the time how devastatingly fitting this launch would be to the Y-PLAN AAMA collaboration.

For the next month, students designed a school store at Oakland High and a class structure that would work better for them at Skyline. By the end of January, the kings, as AAMA students are recognized, had prepared posters and proposals, and representatives from each class joined their teachers for a day-long training in Wurster Hall. They brainstormed together, toured the campus, planned out the semester, and met their clients from BART and the UC Berkeley mentors from Deb's seminar who would work alongside them.

Two weeks later, BART sent teams to provide background and context on the project question to the classes. Students listened to PowerPoint presentations and chimed in with suggestions and immediate feedback for getting more young people to use BART. Lowering the prices to offer youth fares to high school students emerged as a top priority. It is an idea that has since been implemented by BART, in part because of their feedback. Immediately after the introductory session, the BART representative sent this email:

**"Wow!!! Those kids are AMAZING!!! And I don't say that lightly. They hit on every key issue, picked up right away on the impact of Uber on BART ridership, asked about a second tube, debated parking or development...I'm in awe... Thank you so much for including us in this."**

For the next two months, UC Berkeley mentors from Deb's Y-PLAN seminar visited the AAMA classes several times a week. The high school students attended a site visit and inspiration tour designed by BART. They collected data, and designed and distributed surveys to their peers. They created proposals, and their excitement to present to City Hall, to meet the mayor, grew with every class session. Meanwhile, the relationships cultivating a Community of Practice deepened, solidifying the connections of high schoolers to their UC Berkeley mentors, AAMA teachers to CC+S coaches, and administrators to BART clients.

And then yet another young man from one of the Y-PLAN AAMA classes was killed, marking the fourth in the four months since our launch. As that week came to a close, Gourdine called me to thank us for our support and understanding. The mentors had been really great with the kings, and he and the teacher appreciated that Deb and I had each reached out. This would be the 10th student he had buried since December.

*"In his sketch, two suns shone overhead: one on each side of the tracks."*

Then he told me that he had been in classes the day before to help students process the death of yet another classmate. During the class, one student had seemed completely checked out and detached, doodling in a notebook throughout the discussion. It was a student who had struggled, and the adults were concerned about him. When he approached the student at the end of class, he saw the doodle was actually the beginnings of a mural for the Coliseum BART station. The young man is quite an artist, and had drawn an image of the tracks separating the flatlands of East Oakland on one side from the lush hills in the distance. In his sketch, two suns shone overhead: one on each side of the tracks.

It was Friday afternoon, and I called my friend from BART to debrief the emotional week. When I mentioned the sketch, she paused for a moment, and told me she knew which student it was. On the site tour, she had noticed him sitting alone in the train car, so she sat next to him. He had been sketching in a book. She told him she liked his art, and that she'd love to have him design a mural as part of the project if he was interested. He never looked up at her. He never said a word. Later in the day, she remembered him, and walked alongside him at the Coliseum BART. She pointed to a spot she thought a mural could go well, and reminded him of their earlier conversation. He stared at the ground. She asked his name, and he mumbled it to her. He never looked at her, never acknowledged her suggestion. She didn't even know if he was listening.

*"Not only was the city serving as a context for learning, but the connections cultivated in the community of practice were supporting its members, as they co-created solutions to the challenges we all face - across ages, races, and socio-economic contexts."*

But here we were a month later, in the midst of tragedy, and her suggestion was his coping mechanism. **That sketch became the lynchpin of one of the major recommendations to BART, and ultimately the subject of the internship they created for AAMA students the following summer.** Not only was the city serving as a context for learning, but the connections cultivated in the community of practice were supporting its members, as they co-created solutions to the challenges we all face - across ages, races, and socio-economic contexts.

That April, more than twenty-five AAMA kings presented their Y-PLAN recommendations at Oakland City Hall to an audience including the BART General Manager, the Mayor, and the interim OUSD Superintendent. When they did so, they brought with them and displayed the plants their teachers had purchased to hold the space for their fallen classmates in their classrooms at school, and they honored the legacy of those classmates who had passed during the year by sharing a few details about their lives and about their interest in presenting to the Mayor as part of Y-PLAN. Three weeks later, four AAMA kings presented those Y-PLAN proposals to more than fifty BART managers at their Quarterly Managers Meeting. **At the culmination of their presentations, impressed by their recommendations, the BART GM announced, spontaneously, that she would fund internships for these young men to implement their ideas over the summer,** and she called for volunteers to facilitate those interns from the managers present.

On June 26th, 2017, seven kings began their paid summer internships at BART to implement their recommendation of a community mural at Coliseum BART. Over the course of the summer, the kings designed the scope of the mural, released a call for artists, reviewed submissions, and selected the muralist to complete the project. In the years since, their mural has faced hurdles typical of planning processes, but the BART representatives have remained steadfast, unwilling to let it fail. The art has been completed, and it was slated to be unveiled in April of 2020. While COVID-19 has presented another delay, its installation is finally certain.

Meanwhile, the AAMA Y-PLAN partnership has persisted. Three more cohorts of UC Berkeley students from Deb's seminars have mentored kings at four Oakland high schools. **AAMA facilitators have become Y-PLAN veteran teachers, who help train their colleagues, craft project questions,**

**align it with curriculum, and innovate future programming.** Projects have partnered with the Mayor's Office to cultivate a college-going culture for all students and have contributed to regional projects with the [Resilient by Design | Bay Area Challenge](#) and [MTC/ABAG's Horizon Initiative](#). This spring, as COVID-19 has relegated instruction to distance learning across the district, the [AAMA-Y-PLAN partnership](#) continues to flourish, with kings from their student leadership group bolstering the work done in online classrooms to offer invaluable and timely insights to Oakland Housing Authority.

*"On this twentieth anniversary, I am left with a sense of gratitude: for the professor driven to dig at the same point in the sand with a shared belief that underneath lies the key to a more just society; for the opportunity to spend my days bringing some of the most inspiring people I know together toward a common goal; for the commitment to make meaning for and with young people; and for the sense of possibility of what might become of it all as we look toward the future."*

Looking back, it is impossible for me to disentangle the myriad ways Y-PLAN has traversed my own trajectory. Without a doubt, much like the students I have taught over the years, Y-PLAN has shaped me, while I have shaped it. On this twentieth anniversary, I am left with a sense of gratitude: for the professor driven to **dig at the same point in the sand with a shared belief that underneath lies the key to a more just society**; for the opportunity to spend my days **bringing some of the most inspiring people I know together toward a common goal**; for the commitment to make meaning for and with young people; and for the sense of possibility of what might become of it all as we look toward the future.



### **DID YOU KNOW...**

**Y-PLAN WON THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION: CALIFORNIA PUBLIC OUTREACH AWARD OF EXCELLENCE IN 2019.**

**“Reflection: Y-PLAN Tomodachi Softbank Leadership Program ”**  
*by Megumi Inouye, Global Culture, Community, and Education Executive*

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***“How can you expect us to come up with solutions for revitalizing our community when we just lost everything?”***

This question floored me. It was posed by a member of the first cohort of high school students of the Tomodachi Softbank Leadership program, who traveled to UC Berkeley from Japan to partake in the Y-PLAN Leadership studio. These students had recently experienced the unimaginable. The Great East Japanese Tsunami and Earthquake devastated their hometowns, and the losses - of their homes, family members, friends and schoolmates - were fresh in their consciousness. Understandably, the idea of assuming a leadership role was out of their comprehension.

**How could I compassionately and effectively transform these students from a place of feeling like victims of a tragedy to becoming agents of change for themselves and their community?**

As a Y-PLAN Tomodachi instructor, I faced an intense situation unlike anything I've faced before. I struggled deeply, especially as I got to know the students better. I couldn't help but get emotionally involved with their stories of hardship and often incomprehensible circumstances. Nine years into the Y-PLAN Tomodachi program, I still look back on that first year and reflect on what ultimately resulted in a transformative experience not only for my students, but for me as an instructor.

**What moment empowered those students to come out of their personal struggles and assume leadership role in their community?**

**Were there specific experiences that helped students see themselves as leaders?**

What was true in 2002 about the Y-PLAN methodology and process still holds true today. As a core part of the Y-PLAN curriculum, students are invited to come up with community development and revitalization proposals for another community in need of social or economic development solutions. Students are presented with real life civic issues requiring research, analysis and deep thought. The client for that particular year was the City of Berkeley, which asked the scholars for their input on how to inject more vibrancy into its downtown area.

***“In that moment, students were transported out of their daily struggles to the difficulties of a new community. They were challenged to come up with ideas to elevate the local situation.”***

I saw a major shift in my students as they embarked on their field research. They observed a significant homeless population, gated children's parks that faced safety concerns, and streetscape problems spanning from litter to issues of drug problems and crime impacting neighborhoods. In that moment, students were transported out of their daily struggles to the difficulties of a new community. They were challenged to come up with ideas to elevate the local situation.

Their demeanor changed as they immersed themselves both individually and as a team to come up with creative solutions for the City of Berkeley. The withdrawn students became engaged and lively.



*by Jessie Stewart, Executive Director, Richmond Promise*

I found Y-PLAN in the summer of 2012, while completing my masters in City and Regional planning at the University of Oregon. Prior to school, I had taught high school history in Chicago the past five years, and seeing the capacity and desire of my students to participate in the change that was happening around their neighborhood, but without authentic pathways to do so, combined with the relentless measurement of success defined by test scores and outputs without acknowledgement of the myriad inputs that affect student success, I was eager to approach education from a different angle. This led me to pursue my Masters in City Planning in Eugene, OR, where I quickly realized that discussion of schools, young people, and education was atypical amidst the more traditional research and practitioner exploration of the built environment. I too, was interested in interrogating the way the built environment can impact human behavior, choices, and the environment, but I was confounded that we could be visioning these long-range 50 year plans without including the perspectives and voices of young people - the current and future end-users, leaders, and critical participants of our future. **If we were serious about designing healthy, equitable, inclusive communities, shouldn't young people be at the center?**

*“I remember feeling like I had finally found my intellectual home - although in a different state, and at a different school entirely!”*

It was early into my academic journey at the U of O when I encountered the Center for Cities and Schools - at the recommendation of my professor and mentor Gerardo Sandoval, who earned his PhD at UC Berkeley with Jeff Vincent, the cofounder of the Center for Cities and Schools. He remembered Y-PLAN, and I immediately read Deb and Jeff's seminal article "[Engaging Schools in Urban Revitalization - The Y-PLAN \(Youth--Plan, Learn, Act, Now!\)](#)." As I read this article, I remember feeling like I had finally found my intellectual home - although in a different state, and at a different school entirely! Here were thought-leaders that were thinking differently - within an entire research center dedicated to the ideas I had been exploring alone in Oregon. The article not only discussed the important policy implications and possibilities for connecting education and city planning, but also outlined the pioneering methodology of Y-PLAN - for the authentic engagement of young people in city planning and civic action. I knew I had to find a way to get involved in this work. From a teaching perspective, it spoke to me as an opportunity to take project-based learning to the next level, and engage young people authentically. From a city planning perspective, it was a cutting-edge method to plan with and for young people, creating pathways for diverse community engagement and in turn, plan better places and opportunities for everyone.

I found a way to get involved with Y-PLAN in the summer of 2012 through the TOMODACHI program. I was fortunate to be selected as one of twelve instructors to lead this innovative pilot program that engaged over 200 young people from the Tohoku region of Japan in the Y-PLAN, the year after the tsunami crisis. Together, we adapted the Y-PLAN method to engage these young people in a studio focused on downtown Berkeley. They then applied the same methodology to ideate action plans for their home communities. **It was a privilege of a lifetime to engage with these young people and fellow instructors, a formative experience that has solidified my belief in the transformative power of this work and the universal value of young people to effect positive global change.**

This position stretched and put to use my "city planning" and "teacher" brains as we sought to adapt city planning principles and create a toolkit for young people around the major elements of a "place."

I was so nervous - how was I going to communicate across cultures and language? I was just learning about city planning -- how was I going to teach it?! My anxieties were soon put to rest when I realized **the language of Y-PLAN is universal.**

*"The process reaffirmed my confidence in the universal power of young people's contributions, leadership and potential, and reinforced my desire to contribute to what was clearly showing potential to be, and becoming a movement - in any way possible."*

It was my job to set the conditions, scaffold the Y-PLAN framework and build community, trust, and confidence for these young people to use their voice. Once that was set, it was in their hands as they took to the streets of Berkeley to apply a completely fresh vision to the future of downtown. **To see their resilience, energy and insight in the wake of unimaginable tragedy was incredibly inspiring and affirming of young people's ability to transform and imagine in a time of despair.** The process reaffirmed my confidence in the universal power of young people's contributions, leadership and potential, and reinforced my desire to contribute to what was clearly showing potential to be, and becoming a movement - in any way possible.

After I graduated with my MCP, I had the privilege to join the Y-PLAN team to support the national expansion of Y-PLAN, where we had the privilege and opportunity to test and demonstrate the universality and scalability of the Y-PLAN across ten diverse cities.

With the launch of Y-PLAN National, I also had the privilege to learn from Deb McKoy, who continues to lead with extraordinary vision, humility, and by example - illustrated in her enduring relationships and in the work across geographies and cultures.

At the outset, as we planned for the expansion outside of the Bay Area and across the country, some key questions were at the core:

- *How could we scale with integrity?*
- *Could the Y-PLAN model and principles work outside of the Bay Area where CC+S had the ability to monitor and support in such a high-touch capacity?*
- *How would Y-PLAN work at a distance?*
- *Who did we need as allies in this work?*

The task at hand was large, and the timeline to launch was relatively swift. We led with what we knew to be true - the core proof-points and principles that made Y-PLAN work locally and regionally over the past decade. First, we had to lead with humility and do the work to **build authentic relationships and trust** across cities and identify cross-sector local champions who believed in the work, and held social and political capital. From there, we sought to **build a community of practice** in each city - diverse members of the community who would come together to build the necessary partnerships and pathways and project questions (and remove barriers) for authentic youth engagement.

Expanding across geographies required foundation-building and time to understand the "why" and identify the foundational partner for each community. For some communities, like Richmond, the "why" started with the city - with leadership focused on avenues to expand inclusive participation. For others, the "why" rested on the educational value of Y-PLAN as a classroom-based method for work-based learning, alignment with common-core, and an alternative to traditional internship structure. In most places, we would cultivate one champion with local trust and credibility. From there, we worked with them to earn the multi-pronged and cross-sector investment and buy-in that is core to Y-PLAN.

We also took great care in thinking about how to build capacity and provide support across great distances. **We knew the digital could not replace the personal, but that leveraging the power of technology and creating an open-source community of practice could allow Y-PLAN to expand and flourish** beyond what we could do as a small team in Berkeley.

*"We leveraged technology to create open-source digital toolkit that continues to be a cornerstone of Y-PLAN's success..."*

To support our national sites, we delivered in-person training and developed a digital curriculum to support readiness in each city, and ultimately built leadership and ownership of the process, empowering participants to implement their own Y-PLAN projects. We leveraged technology to create open-source digital toolkit that continues to be a cornerstone of Y-PLAN's success, and an enduring example of CC+S's and Y-PLAN's mission to share, spread, and democratize the best-practices learned through years at Berkeley, so that more cities, schools, and communities can build and implement projects and make Y-PLAN their own, and bring young people to the center of their planning processes and civic engagement.

Deb and I hit the road throughout 2014-2016, traveling from Richmond and Oakland, CA, to Detroit, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, New York, and Dallas, Texas. We built partnerships, planned and innovated on a unique range of projects, and learned so much from each city. While each context is unique, certain lessons rose to the top that continue to inform the momentum and upward trajectory of Y-PLAN to this day. Y-PLAN National's expansion pushed us to think critically about what is core to Y-PLAN, and challenged us to distill the key elements beyond academia and into a language and format that could be useful and speak across sectors.

A snapshot of projects (many continue today!):

- **Washington D.C.:** *Closing the Digital Divide*
- **Dallas:** *Equitable Access to Open Space*
- **Richmond, CA:** *Climate Action Plan, Transportation Connectivity*
- **Oakland, CA:** *Equitable and Accessible Transportation Routes*
- **New York:** *Apps for Vision Zero*
- **Detroit:** *Access to Healthy Food*
- **New Orleans:** *Examining "Hunger" in New Orleans' Urban Core*

## **Lessons we learned from Y-PLAN National:**

### **Scope Matters**

The most successful projects take time beforehand to a) establish roles and responsibilities; b) identify the right project question (topic and scope), and c) plan and calendar the core milestones and bake it into the curriculum. Taking this time to plan results in a more robust and enjoyable experience for the client, teachers, and most importantly, students. The best project questions address a real need, and incorporate visible/tangible short-term milestones within a longer-range vision or plan.

### **Building the Community of Practice and Identifying Adult Allies**

Y-PLAN is built on the academic concept of a "community of practice" - diverse individuals who come together and contribute diverse expertise, and learn and grow around a common need or mission. One of the universal findings across projects, is that taking time to establish the necessary stakeholders and set the conditions for authentic dialogue and engagement across diverse constituents is critical. It is also important to identify "champions" horizontally and vertically across traditional power structures - someone in the "bully pulpit" with influence from the top and power to set the conditions for success, as well as folks on the ground, students and partners engaged in the work.

### **Finding the "Win-Win"**

The core of Y-PLAN is the a) authenticity of the project and client question and b) the collaboration between institutional partners to bring Y-PLAN into the classroom and bake it into the school experience for all students (as opposed to an after school program). Therefore, it is essential that the city-school partners find real value in the process - it is essential that the city partner finds a real value in the project question and youth participation, and that the education partner sees the academic value, the curriculum fit, and the opportunity for Y-PLAN to make learning

### **Historic Context, Reflection, and Collaborative Action Planning**

Engaging young people in action-research around visible inequity without building in time for an examination of critical historical context, along with reflection, can be dangerous and deflating. It is important for adult allies and teachers to be equipped with the tools to engage students in the history context and history of invisible decisions and policies that structure visible inequities. Without this, the risk is a deficient framework and self-blame, without actionable tools and strategy to impact change. This reflection should be coupled with action planning and a menu of tools and methods for policy change.

### **The Role of the Intermediary**

While cities and schools are hungry for this work, both institutions are often at capacity. The Center for Cities & Schools and the Y-PLAN team continue to act as an intermediary. Through technical assistance in project planning, setting the necessary conditions for authentic student participation, training in the curriculum, and the robust digital toolkit that keeps improving, the Y-PLAN team is the glue that helps these projects come together and come to life.

## Lessons we learned from Y-PLAN National (cont.):

### The Future is Bright

Across geography, the universal truth remains the same - when we plan with and for young people, we plan better places and make better decisions for everyone. This was illustrated in positive changes in people's attitudes and their belief in the value of youth voice, more equitable and inclusive planning processes, and improvements in place or the built environment.

### Digital Access is an Essential Component, but Cannot Stand Alone

Digital cannot replace the personal, but the digital tools have democratized the Y-PLAN process with universal access to the method and allowing Y-PLAN to scale, adapt, and inspire global impact.

### Young People's Insights are Diverse, but Hold Universal Truths

Across projects, young people care about equity and justice, and can name and see what is not. They want safe neighborhoods, they are concerned about their families' health and want access to healthy foods and mental health care. They know diversity makes us stronger, that when we plan to address the needs of the most vulnerable, we make better places for everyone, and they are concerned about the future and are not sure that adults have their best interests at heart. They want to be taken seriously and they want to be part of the change.

With the rise of young people's power and voice seen in movements like Parkland, Florida's high school students standing up to insufficient gun regulation and Greta Thunberg's fight for climate justice, our nation and the globe are starting to notice something the Center for Cities & Schools and Y-PLAN have known all along, and have been championing the past 20 years: we need to take young people seriously and create opportunities for authentic participation - our future depends on it. **When we listen to young people, we get to the truth and the heart of the matter, and we have the capacity to plan better policies and places for everyone. Our future depends on it.**

I am so glad I could play a small role in the continued expansion and growth of Y-PLAN, and I can't wait to see what the next 20 years will bring!!

***For the four years of my engagement with Y-PLAN National, I had the privilege to witness young people's brilliance, and I feel confident that if we continue to give young people the platform, the future is bright.***

### ***DID YOU KNOW...***

**MORE THAN 90% OF Y-PLAN SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN PART OF DISTRICT-WIDE SYSTEMS-BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS SINCE 2015.**

## **“Making New York City Home with Y-PLAN”** *by Ciera Dudley, Educator & Curriculum Designer*

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**I was a second semester senior when I joined the Center for Cities + Schools** in their goal to build healthier, more equitable communities. I enrolled in Deborah McKoy’s City Planning course, and simultaneously applied for a work-study position as an assistant with the Center for Cities + Schools. Without any post-grad commitments lined up, I felt mounting anxiety about my next steps after graduation. I had immersed myself in studies and research for four years, but I was facing my last semester at Cal without a strong connection or dedication to my chosen field; while I loved the rich theoretical texts that I focused on in most of my classes, I felt ill-prepared to partake in practices of urban planning in the “real world.” **I felt disillusioned by the jobs I saw that supported the status quo in cities facing tremendous challenges driven by legacies of structural racism and marginalization of the poor, working class, and people of color.**

I’d walked past the Center for Cities + Schools office dozens of times during my undergraduate studies in Wurster Hall and admired the colorful posters, photos, and policy briefs, so I jumped on the opportunity to get involved when I saw the opening. Luckily, I was hired as a work study assistant for Amanda Eppley supporting the Y-PLAN expansion in New York City, analyzing data, and supporting projects and events at a distance. This job piqued my interest in a place that I knew very little about, and it ultimately changed the course of my career post-undergrad to one that focuses on urban planning and education. I remember transcribing recordings of student presentations from the Y-PLAN NYC Project Launch, feeling moved by the eloquence of the young people who urged their City Council member to give them a stake in larger issues facing their neighborhood in Brooklyn, insisting that the full class attend and present about their fight to revitalize their school area and fight gentrification.

*“I began to understand how city policy, design, practice, and theory connect to ALL issues of urban life. And I was learning it through work that centered the research and expertise of young people.”*

In Dr. McKoy’s seminar that semester, I learned the Y-PLAN methodology in practice, working as a student mentor with a classroom of sophomores in Oakland at Skyline High School’s Green Academy. Students challenged us at every moment of the project. They questioned why the project site focused on the Downtown Oakland Plan when they didn’t visit nor feel welcome in that area of the city, and they questioned why I as a white, gentrifying, UC Berkeley student was giving them pointers about how to improve their neighborhood. **This very intense experience introduced me to the complexities of entering a classroom as an outsider and the necessity of building trust and acknowledging the expertise of young people in their own experiences living in cities.** I began to understand how city policy, design, and practice (as well as theory) connect to ALL issues of urban life. And I was learning it through work that centered the research and expertise of young people.

At the end of my final semester, Mandy asked if I would consider moving to New York, and CC+S offered me the position of Coordinator for the expanding Y-PLAN initiative in New York City, led by the NYC Department of Education. I knew from my experience facilitating in Skyline High School and assisting with New York City projects, that this was the kind of “real world” urban planning that I wanted to participate in. Although I had never actually been to New York City, I eagerly accepted the job and moved in September, 2016.

The immense challenge of coordinating Y-PLAN in New York City hit me hard. I knew the Y-PLAN curriculum by heart, but I had no idea how to integrate it into a new city and school fabric with such great scale. My experience working in classrooms and facilitating Y-PLAN exercises built my confidence to step into my new position as the NYC Coordinator. **I felt ease in admitting to students that I was new to Brooklyn and Queens and that I, and leaders in schools and the city, needed help learning about the problems that actually matter to young people.** When I stepped back and acknowledged how much I had to learn about New York City, I strived to create space for Y-PLAN scholars to share their experience.

My favorite exercise to lead in classrooms was "What we bring to the table." In it, each student is given a puzzle piece where they write their names and one skill, talent, strength, or interest that they contribute to the classroom and their Y-PLAN project. This activity takes place in Module 1, Starting Up, when students often feel skeptical or unsure about the project and the process. "What we bring to the table" breaks down hierarchies within the classroom and equally values the lived experience and knowledge of all students and educators. **This shift in power allows young people to solve problems like gentrification, homelessness, and food insecurity on their own terms.** I always encouraged students to step into the role of city planner and neighborhood expert, and in doing so, I began owning my practice as a facilitator and coordinator.

*"...the passion and expertise of students and commitment from key education and city partners led to changes in policy and practice throughout New York City."*

In my time as NYC Coordinator from 2016 to 2018, I worked with young people in over 20 schools in Brooklyn and Queens that partnered with more than a dozen civic organizations. Working to make an impact in a city with over 8 million residents and in a school district serving 1.1 million young people was challenging, to say the least. Yet the passion and expertise of students and commitment from key education and city partners led to changes in policy and practice throughout New York City.

**At EBC High School for Public Service**, a city council member and the Department of Transportation committed over [\\$250,000](#) to support students' vision for equitably revitalizing their neighborhood, including creating [30 original art pieces](#) speaking out against gentrification and displacement.

**At Urban Action Academy**, the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence engaged in a [three-year partnership](#) and training where Y-PLAN scholars co-wrote a curriculum for a program to spread awareness about intimate partner violence and make the campus safer for their peers.

**At Grover Cleveland High School**, students consulted with Make the Road NY and [Urban Design Forum](#) to pitch and design apps that support recent immigrants.

Partners like **Council Member Reynoso**, the **New York City Department of Transportation**, the **Brooklyn Borough President's Office**, and the **Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence** continued to partner with CC+S and NYC DOE schools across several years because they gained valuable insight and critique from young people that they were desperately missing in their fields. Y-PLAN provided a link from school to city and offered a helpful toolkit to engage isolated institutions and people that needed each other at the table, even if they didn't know it at the outset.



And as a Coordinator who helped facilitate that link, I had the privilege to **learn from students** about the big and small aspects of the city that made it **home for them** - from their favorite bodega to the best bus line to take across town - all of which **strengthened my connection to New York City as a home for me**, and a place to **continuously fight for equity for and with young people**.



### **DID YOU KNOW...**

**SINCE 2012, 2,000 NEW YORK CITY K-12 STUDENTS FROM 30 DIFFERENT SCHOOLS HAVE PARTNERED WITH 29 CIVIC AGENCIES ON 62 Y-PLAN PROJECTS.**

by Myrna Ortiz Villar, Senior Y-PLAN Program Manager, Center for Cities + Schools

*“En eso edificios está la gente importante, la gente con poder.”*

Growing up in Los Angeles, I spent countless days riding buses. As a child I remember taking the bus to Downtown with my mother as she paid bills at the Department of Water & Power or stopped to shop at los callejones. I would spend the bus ride looking out the window, up at the shiny skyscrapers, wondering what could be happening so high up in the clouds. My mother would say, “En eso edificios está la gente importante, la gente con poder.” (Important people are in those buildings, people with power.)

My family and I migrated to the U.S when I was three years old. I grew up in the neighborhood of Echo Park, up in the Dodger hills, overlooking the city’s skyline. My father, an auto repair mechanic, often picked up extra weekend jobs in La Puente, Pomona, or Long Beach, and would take us along for the hour-long ride. My mother, sisters and I would load the family van on Saturday mornings, with homemade lunches packed, ready for the long drive out of our quiet neighborhood. **I loved being able to see the bustling of the city never actually ending, even as we drove thirty miles away from home.**

*“I became an expert at navigating the city as a teenager and became more interested in what I was seeing happening in the communities I was commuting through, from new physical developments to the shifting demographics in each neighborhood.”*

During middle school, I began commuting for over an hour every weekday morning from Echo Park to West Hollywood. I would ride a yellow bus to and from school with kids from Silver Lake, Little Armenia, and the East Hollywood neighborhoods. **And again I would spend the bus ride noticing how each neighborhood differed from the next.** As a high school sophomore, I began to take classes at LA City College, and needed to take public transit after school alone. I became an expert at navigating the city as a teenager and became more interested in what I was seeing happening in the communities I was commuting through, from new physical developments to the shifting demographics in each neighborhood.

The following year, as I began to think about applying to college, **I also began to face the challenges of being an undocumented student.** I had every intention of going to college but I was not sure how it was all going to work out. A friend in class shared that her sister was a youth organizer working for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) and gave me her number to reach out. After a conversation with my parents, they agreed I should call her and see what resources they could offer me. When I connected with my friend’s sister, I learned the organization was hosting a leadership group of high school students every Wednesday for youth who shared my immigration status.

The following Wednesday, I made sure to catch the first bus after school to Historic Filipinotown, where the CHIRLA offices were located.

Within months I was actively involved with the organization's youth group, and began hosting leadership workshops and informational sessions for immigrant students at my own school. As a group, we organized rallies and marches to fight anti-immigrant policies or demand access to financial resources for higher education. Every May 1st, we galvanized the community to take over Broadway in Downtown. Thousands of people filled the streets, rallying side by side with their family and friends.

**We would pass by the same Downtown skyscrapers, chanting and marching.**

As a graduating high school senior I had been admitted to UCLA, but did not qualify for financial aid to pay for tuition. My family borrowed money to cover my first semester classes, so I lived at home and commuted two hours each way down Sunset Boulevard on the bus, from our home to UCLA daily. But by the time final exams came around, I knew we were not going to afford paying tuition for the second semester.

*"Our campaigns took me from the CA Capitol building to lobby state legislators for the CA Dream Act, to Washington D.C. for President Obama's inauguration, where we rallied to demand he sign a comprehensive immigration reform bill within his first one hundred days in office."*

I dropped out of college and became a full-time youth organizer. **For five years, I organized with other undocumented youth campaigning for crucial state and national policies that would support my community and protect my family.** Our campaigns took me from the CA Capitol building to lobby state legislators for the CA Dream Act, to Washington D.C. for President Obama's inauguration, where we rallied to demand he sign a comprehensive immigration reform bill within his first one hundred days in office.

**From Downtown Los Angeles to Sacramento, to our nation's capital, we rallied outside important buildings, trying to impact the decisions being made inside by "la gente con poder."**

As an organizer, I traveled across California to work with undocumented students in over fifty colleges and universities. Experiencing how communities from Bakersfield, Stockton, and East Palo Alto lived and interacted with their environments sparked in me a stronger interest in cities. **I wanted to learn how the local environments were impacting these families, and how the people, through their work and daily lives, were in turn impacting their cities.**

In 2011, coordinated grassroots efforts across the state convinced California Governor Brown to sign the CA Dream Act into law, opening the doors to financial aid for college to undocumented students like myself. The following year, President Obama was pressured by national campaigns of undocumented youth to announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program through an Executive Action, that would provide protection from deportation and a temporary legal work permit to immigrants who had entered the country before their sixteenth birthday.

With these two policies in place, I now had a real opportunity to go back to school and finish my undergraduate education.

As I began to look into studying how cities worked, I realized UCLA did not have an undergraduate major in City Planning, although they had one of the best graduate schools in this field. I became frustrated with the thought of returning to UCLA to finish a Political Science degree I had started years before, but was less interested in now. My interest had begun to shift away from state and national policies to more local and community development issues. So I decided to move out of Los Angeles and pursue an undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design in Urban Studies instead.

*"I began to see how the socio-economic dynamics I had grown up with in Los Angeles had shaped me. And I learned how my city - how all cities were shaped by the decisions of people working in those tall Downtown buildings."*

**My education at Cal soon revealed how much those hours of bus rides and looking out the window had taught me about city planning.** Learning from my professors, I began to see how the socio-economic dynamics I had grown up with in Los Angeles had shaped me. And I learned how my city - how all cities were shaped by the decisions of people working in those tall Downtown buildings.

In 2015 I enrolled in the city planning class, CP 190 "Y-PLAN (Youth - Plan, Learn, Act, Now)" course with Professor Deborah McKoy, and was excited to bring my experience working with youth into the field of planning. As a transfer student, this class was my first opportunity at Cal to authentically connect my education with local communities. That semester I was tasked with mentoring Y-PLAN high school students in the City of Richmond, a historically industrial community seven miles north of Berkeley, which had actually become my new home when I relocated to the Bay Area. I was eager to connect to youth and build community. After seeing how effectively city staff engaged with youth and hearing that the student recommendations would be included in the City of Richmond's Climate Action Plan because of this project, I wanted to learn more about the work. I stayed involved, first as a volunteer, and then as a work-study Y-PLAN Coach, supporting teachers and students in the classrooms.

**I have been part of the Center for Cities + Schools for the last five years and have had the honor of working with and learning from youth and partners across northern CA, from Sacramento to Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose.** Two years ago, as I was reviewing our team's calendar for the week, I noticed Mandy, our Assistant Director, had scheduled a call with the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning (LACDRP). Being from L.A., I wondered why she hadn't invited me to join that call, so I asked her about it at our next check-in. She shared that their staff had emailed wanting to learn more about Y-PLAN but didn't want me to get too excited, because she wasn't sure much would come out of the call. Almost 10 months later, we got news that the LACDRP team had secured funding from the 4th District County Supervisor, Janice Hahn, to implement Y-PLAN with Rowland High School and engage youth in the development of the East San Gabriel Valley Area Plan. **I was thrilled with the possibility of doing a Y-PLAN project in the communities my father would drive us to for his weekend jobs.**

At the end of last summer, we hosted a day-long Y-PLAN training at Rowland High School where we met school leaders and teachers. The next morning, our team was scheduled to have our first in-person meeting with the LACDRP team at their Downtown offices.

That morning Deb, Mandy and I left our Rowland Heights hotel early to beat the rush-hour traffic into Downtown. Half way through the drive, we began to notice the rental car having trouble keeping up with the moving traffic. As we approached Union Station from the east, I suggested we exit the freeway to avoid being stuck in the usual gridlock of that area. We took the local streets instead, thinking it would be better for the car. Entering Downtown, we drove up Temple Street with the faulty vehicle struggling to make it up the hill. We just needed a few more blocks to arrive at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels parking garage, where I remember my family would park when we attended Sunday morning mass there.

*"As a kid, I wondered what happened up in those Downtown buildings. As a teen, I protested and rallied on the streets outside of them. And this time, I was walking in as a professional, invited to advise la gente importante inside."*

We pulled into the Cathedral's garage, parked the car, and made our way across the street to the County office building. I was very eager to go inside the Planning Department's offices, to see the maps on the walls, and to meet the group of people making decisions that will design the L.A. region for years to come. As a kid, I wondered what happened up in those Downtown buildings. As a teen, I protested and rallied on the streets outside of them. And this time, I was walking in as a professional, invited to advise la gente importante inside.

*"My journey took me away from my hometown, and leaving has now given me the opportunity to come back in this capacity."*

During the meeting it was obvious to everyone in the room that I was very excited to be there. **The kid inside me was jumping with joy and my smile was permanent.** This new partnership was allowing me to do things I could have only dreamt of as a child. When I moved out of L.A. eight years ago, I left my community and my organizing efforts behind to study city planning, and at that point, the academic and professional road I wanted to continue was not possible in Los Angeles, as the opportunities were not there. My journey took me away from my hometown, and leaving has now given me the opportunity to come back in this capacity. **As Senior Program Manager for the Y-PLAN Initiative, I am now uniquely positioned to bring students, teachers, and school leaders together with the city planning departments in their own communities.**



When I was finally getting ready to meet the Rowland High students, I was eager to engage in conversation with them about the region and the neighborhoods I grew up in. As I spent time preparing slides for my classroom presentations, I decided to include the historical map of Los Angeles County's redlining policies. I often use these maps for Oakland and Sacramento slides to get students to understand how these historical policies continue to shape their communities today. In Oakland, I feed off what the students share and I dig deep into my Bay Area knowledge from having studied in Berkeley. But for the Rowland High classes, I was ready to dig deep into my own childhood experiences.

In early February this year, during my class visits to Rowland High, I could hear myself in every comment students made, from not believing, at first, that civic leaders actually cared about their youth insight, to the frustration of seeing limited opportunities in their community to go to college or get a good paying job. When I asked the youth if they expected to continue living in Rowland Heights in the next five to ten years, most of them giggled and were quick to say no. I followed up asking where they thought they would be living by then, and one student said jokingly from the back of the classroom, "Silicon Valley."

*"I, too, once did not think I could continue on with my education and career if I had stayed in L.A., but Y-PLAN showed me that change is possible."*

Years earlier, I left Los Angeles to seek better options for my future, so I understood why the students did not think of their own community as the place where they could build a future. I, too, once did not think I could continue on with my education and career if I had stayed in L.A., but Y-PLAN showed me that change is possible. So I continued pressing students to think deeper about why they felt the need to leave their neighborhood after high school. I wanted them to shift their mindset from feeling the need to leave, to feeling the need to transform this community for it to offer the resources and opportunities they would be motivated to seek.

For over a decade, I've worked to make youth voices central to the decision-making processes and policies that impact their communities. Through our Y-PLAN projects, I continue doing just that, holding space for young people to collaborate with city planners, housing advocates, or transportation experts everyday.

*Y-PLAN has given me and thousands of young people over the last twenty years, an opportunity to reach those buildings of power and in doing so, to influence la gente con poder making decisions that shape our everyday lives.*



## **“Reflecting on Regional Youth-Led Resilience in the Age of COVID-19”**

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*by Tira Okamoto, Project Manager, Civic Edge Consulting*

**The world seems pretty tumultuous right now.** The global pandemic in progress has exposed even more the existing racial, class, gender, and ableist inequities in our country. I, and many others who have the privileges of a paycheck, health care, a roof over head, and access to food and outdoor spaces, are faced with a choice: Do we carry on and pretend it is business as usual, productivity and “time as money” mentality full-speed ahead? Or do we make different choices rooted in a sense of regeneration and collective, to take care of all of us and our planet?

*“When young people step into their power and adults are truly listening, when dialogue is about people brainstorming with curiosity how to make our communities safer, healthier, more inclusive, and resilient, magic happens and communities are changed.”*

Y-PLAN is one of the methods of making those different, conscious choices. The existing script delineating who holds power and valued knowledge at a given age is flipped. Principles like power sharing and collective project goals between young people and their adult civic partners set the conditions for a different kind of partnership. However, the magic of Y-PLAN is revealed when young people share their proposals for change rooted in their experience of living, working, playing, and existing within their communities and engage in dialogue with adults. When young people step into their power and adults are truly listening, when dialogue is about people brainstorming with curiosity how to make our communities safer, healthier, more inclusive, and resilient, magic happens and communities are changed.

I first experienced the magic of Y-PLAN through the Resilient by Design Y-PLAN Youth Challenge during the 2017-2018 school year. I worked for Resilient by Design (RbD) and supported coordination for the sister regional youth challenge that engaged Y-PLAN student scholars from Oakland, Richmond, San Francisco, East Palo Alto and San Rafael on sea level rise resilience. The RbD Youth Challenge was the first time the Y-PLAN/CC+S team gathered Bay Area young people together to discuss climate resilience and the first time many regional leaders working on climate adaptation heard reflections from young people on these issues.

For me, the Youth Challenge highlighted how planning for a climate resilient future must expand beyond analyzing flood maps, hazards, and cost of inaction. **Y-PLAN student scholars pushed back on the Youth Challenge prompt and questioned the confines of “climate resilience,” offering a more holistic definition of “resilience” that included their lived experience as resilient people and as members of resilient communities.** Their proposals for a resilient Bay Area reflected ideas for increasing safety, sustainability, and access and addressing existing regional inequities, including affordable housing, homelessness, and displacement as well as access to healthy food, open space, and education. At the culminating Youth Challenge Summit, I had the great privilege of witnessing moments of power-sharing and dialogue between young people and adults - the magic of Y-PLAN had clearly been felt.

**These powerful moments have shown me, and I hope many adult civic partners, that it is possible to make different choices in how we relate and treat one another and what is possible through inclusive collaboration.**

I continued to see the magic of Y-PLAN emerge through my work as part of the Y-PLAN/CC+S team during the 2018-2019 school year through a regional partnership with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. Y-PLAN student scholars in all nine Bay Area counties research and developed proposals responding to the future of schools in the year 2050. Through the MTC/ABAG partnership, students from fourth through twelfth grades explored the project through the lens of four sectors: transportation, housing, economic development, and resilience. This work again prompted dialogue on current regional challenges and young people's lived experience navigating and existing in their cities. Students argued that a resilient school in 2050 means addressing air quality concerns due to truck and freeway travel in addition to growing impacts from wildfire smoke. Likewise, a 2050 school with futuristic transportation also must address current neighborhood safety concerns and insufficient public transportation.

*"In working with Y-PLAN student scholars, I see now that young people are drivers of change, and that their lived experience is integral to lifting up the needs, priorities, and dreams of their communities."*

Envisioning a future where young people, like Y-PLAN student scholars, are thriving means tackling current regional issues now - affordable housing, displacement, jobs, efficient and effective public transportation, and open space for all, to name a few. Climate change impacts have and will continue to exacerbate those existing inequities within the region and a climate resilient region cannot be created without looking more deeply at systemic oppression and inequitable city-making practices. In working with Y-PLAN student scholars, I see now that young people are drivers of change, and that their lived experience is integral to lifting up the needs, priorities, and dreams of their communities. The global pandemic we're currently experiencing further proves that resilient communities continue to exist because of long histories of inequities that have given rise to collective struggle, resistance, and care as well as constant reimagination and reclamation.

Although now is a time of great grief, uncertainty, and dormancy, it has reminded me of the deep wisdom that Y-PLAN student scholars have been sharing all along. Three insights that have come to me in the last several weeks:

1. Resilience can be engineered through city planning, but it is best cultivated by people and tended to through their relationships to each other and the land.
2. Realizing an inclusive future means understanding what is already happening and why.
3. Hope and joy are abundant and rooted in care of oneself and community.

The last step of the Y-PLAN methodology is Looking Back & Looking Forward. I look back at these two Y-PLAN Bay Area projects that generated regional dialogue between young people and adults and remember the magical moments when Y-PLAN student scholars stepped into their power and shared their lived experience. I attempt to process and grieve what is happening now across our region and the world. **I look forward and see hope and joy amidst the sadness as we exercise different choices that bring us closer together in solidarity and collective imagination.**

### ***DID YOU KNOW...***

**IN 2019 Y-PLAN WON THE BAY AREA METRO AWARD FOR THE Y-PLAN RBD YOUTH CHALLENGE AND THE AIASF COMMUNITY ALLIANCE SOCIAL IMPACT AWARD**

**“Beyond the Numbers”**  
*by Haarini Sridhar, UC Berkeley '21*

I began working for the Center for Cities + Schools during my freshman year of college when I first moved to California. It was one of the first things that I was able to be a part of when I got to campus, and it has been one of the most impactful parts of my college experience. I have been part of the Y-PLAN team for about 3 years now, and I can say that it has made a lasting impact on my life and on my worldview.

My experience with Y-PLAN has been especially unique because, unlike many of the other people that are part of the Y-PLAN team, I came onto the team with more of a data driven, hard science background. My work with Y-PLAN consists of documentation and research assistance; essentially I am the one that supports work with the databases, the graphs, and the numbers. **However, so much of what Y-PLAN is and does cannot simply be quantified in the ways that I am accustomed.**

*“Y-PLAN has made me realize that I had to give back to my community and work toward equal access to resources for everyone.”*

Being a biology major, my background is in an area of study that believes in binaries. The scientific field is one that attempts to be apolitical because, ostensibly, we study in a world ruled by fact. However, I have learned, especially with the current political climate, that even science can be political and that everyone needs to be paying attention to the world around us. **Y-PLAN has taught me that the world has so much more nuance to it than I could have ever imagined, and I've been able to learn that there is so much more to every issue than I could have ever initially thought.** Y-PLAN not only works with schools, but it also works on equity, attempting to connect students from more underprivileged communities directly to the city leaders that are supposed to be supporting them, fostering more direct lines of communication and an environment of mutual growth. Because of Y-PLAN's emphasis on equity and community engagement, I have fast found a passion for applying those elements to the field I hope to go into: medicine. Y-PLAN has made me realize that I had to give back to my community and work toward equal access to resources for everyone.

Working at the Center for Cities + Schools with the Y-PLAN team has also been a place where I could think about and work on things that were outside of the pre-med world that I'm used to. **It has provided for me a space where I could get away from the competitiveness of the field and grades and think instead about how students can work together against the gentrification of communities, and how youth voice can and should make an impact.** Hearing about the projects and the questions that the students were trying to answer with Y-PLAN has forced me to understand that many issues in our world are often far more entrenched and institutionalized than one might expect, that race is an issue everywhere, including in schools. It has made me recognize how privileged and lucky I was to get the education I got and how lucky I am to be attending the university I attend.

Y-PLAN has made me realize how crucial it is to integrate the youth voice into our governmental systems early, because it is the youths of this world who will assume those leadership positions down the line. They will have far farther to push if they inherit a world in which they never had a say. Instead, if they are integrated from the beginning, they will have had the chance and been given the space to vocalize their concerns on climate change, on gun violence, on gentrification, and will be more equipped to carry the torch and create a more equitable and sustainable future.

Y-PLAN has taught me that **climate change has farther reaching impacts than I ever thought**, and that it will take innovation and imagination to both combat and deal with climate change.

Y-PLAN has illuminated for me that **there is so much more to sustainability than just reducing carbon emissions**; it's about widespread education, and innovation, it's about teaching everyone that this is something that will change the way we live, making that information available to everyone no matter age, and giving them the space to think of ways to live with climate change and survive.

Y-PLAN has shown me a **space run by a diverse group of passionate, intelligent, like-minded women whose goal was to create equitable spaces** where everyone could be welcomed to the conversation.

*"I have learned that we are all capable of resilience. Through hardship, through discrimination, through all the things that can come our way, **humans are resilient.**"*

Crucially, Y-PLAN has taught me about **resilience**, which is possibly the most important lesson, especially in this moment in time. I have learned that we are all capable of resilience. Through hardship, through discrimination, through all the things that can come our way, humans are resilient. In this time of crisis, **when all of the glaring inequities in the health-care system, in the education system, in the way we interact with the world and our environment, in the many systems at play in our everyday lives, we need to know that we can all make an impact and we can make a change.** Even the smallest measures can snowball to large effect. We are resilient and we can come through this with ideas for how we can make the world a better place after the pandemic.

***Y-PLAN has taught me many things, most of all,  
Y-PLAN has taught me to look beyond the numbers.***

### **DID YOU KNOW...**

**Y-PLAN PROJECTS** HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN **60 DIFFERENT COURSES**, & NEARLY **50% OF PROJECTS** ARE WITHIN **STE(A)M** (SCIENCE, TECH, ENG, ART, MATH) **CLASSES**.

## **“Young People Envision a Thriving Future for Bayview”**

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*by Shirl Buss, Ph.D., Creative Director, CC+S &  
Prescott Reavis, RA, NOMA, LEED AP, SEED, NCARB*

We were worried. We were about to ask 4th grade students at Malcolm X Academy for their help in combating climate change and we had some trepidation about introducing issues this big to students so young. Many adult leaders feel these issues are too complicated, too overwhelming, or too far in the future to be a priority. Some of us feared that these issues might be too abstract or complex for elementary age children to engage with in a meaningful way. We speculated that the long-term impacts might make it difficult for them to sustain interest, or that some of the projections about sea level rise might even scare the children.

*“They wanted to be engaged in authentic issues and were not daunted by real, difficult problems.”*

**To our delight and surprise, when we first asked these fourth graders to take on these challenges, they enlisted with vigor.** They wanted to be engaged in authentic issues and were not daunted by real, difficult problems. Their proposals were imaginative, realistic, and lovingly attentive to people, wildlife and the land. The students translated their research into models and posters featuring their own vibrant strategies to protect the San Francisco shoreline, Islais Creek, and Bayview from flooding, while increasing accessibility, livability, and awareness.

***“How old are we going to be when the sea level rises?”***

***“When it comes, where’s the water going to go?”***

These are questions the students from Malcolm X Academy asked when Y-PLAN and the San Francisco Planning Department first engaged them in an initiative focused on the impact of climate change and sea level rise on the Bayview neighborhoods. As part of the Planning Department’s commitment to seriously engage young people in the community development process, Aaron Yen, Robin Abad Ocubillo, Luiz Barata and Sue Exline brought professional expertise, technical tools, and their ongoing projects into the classroom. Shirl Buss from Y-PLAN, along with Prescott Reavis and D’Sjon Dixon from the San Francisco Chapter of The National Organization of Minority Architects (SFNOMA), brought pedagogical and curricular experience, as well as architectural expertise to the engagement team.

To launch the project, we asked the students to assess their personal assets. Each student wrote down five distinctive adjectives describing his or her strengths and talents: i.e., Creative, Athletic, Musical, Loyal, Friendly, Kind, Smart, etc. To begin to learn about planning and design they built model skyscrapers—testing structural forces, adding details, and creating uniquely beautiful edifices. Because of the limit on height, and width for their towers, the children concentrated on qualities such as elegance, strength, and balance. For a finishing touch, they affixed colorful paper discs bearing their five adjectives plus their name onto the completed “Tower of Power.”

Moving toward our project question, we introduced Islais Creek to the students. The creek—once the source of fresh drinking water for 85% of San Francisco's populace—is the largest body of water in the city. It flows downstream from the higher hills into the Islais Creek estuary and the San Francisco Bay. Over the past 150 + years humans have degraded its waters by throwing trash, toxins, and waste into it. Now most of it is covered with concrete, and the open part is surrounded by industrial yards and roadways. The creek and adjacent areas will fill with water when the sea level rises.

The students' next challenge was to build Friendship Bridges. They worked in pairs to build model bridges designed to span different sections of a topographic model of the creek's watershed. Their bridge symbolically combined each partner's strengths and talents. **As they placed their completed bridges on the topo model, they began to understand the geographic scope of the creek.** We also introduced the project question: "How can we educate our families and community about the impacts of sea level rise on Bayview and San Francisco?" grounding that question within the geographic context of the watershed.

Our adult team then introduced some of the issues associated with climate change and sea level rise to the group. Aaron and Robin brought in "inundation maps" from the Planning Department showing high water projections for Islais Creek and the surrounding Bayview neighborhoods over the next 10-100 years. In subsequent sessions, the students also viewed videos, maps and other resources, to deepen their knowledge of the dynamics of climate change.

As inspiration for their next hands-on challenge, the students studied images of famous monuments and landmarks around the world, such as the Martin Luther King memorial in Washington DC. Working in teams, they then created scale models of their ideas for landmarks to be situated along Islais Creek. Each "landmark" was designed to function as a powerful feature in the built environment and also to educate the public about a specific theme such as toxic waste, environmental racism, native animal habitats, etc. For example, at the "Conservation" landmark, the students' model featured windmills and solar panels to teach about energy capture. Another landmark featured interpretive information and view-framing to feature native plants and animals now thriving (or threatened) along the SF Bay shoreline.

*"The entire group rose to the occasion, as they hosted hundreds of teens, adults—even the press—at their exhibit where their models of the landmarks along Islais Creek, the Towers of Power, and the Friendship Bridges were on display."*

Near the end of the semester, the entire group traveled to UC Berkeley to participate in the Y-PLAN Youth Summit. This brought together high school students, teachers, and adult civic leaders to learn about young people's design and policy recommendations for the future of the SF Bay Area. **The Malcolm X students were the only elementary school-aged youths invited to exhibit and present their projects at the Summit.** The entire group rose to the occasion, as they hosted hundreds of teens, adults—even the press—at their exhibit where their models of the landmarks along Islais Creek, the Towers of Power, and the Friendship Bridges were on display. Two girls spoke to the entire audience from the formal podium. The next day, the students' photos and quotes were prominently featured in an article about the Summit in the San Francisco Chronicle.

For their final project the students created large, colorful posters to dramatically convey their feelings about—and knowledge of—how climate change will directly impact the lives of their family and friends. At our culminating exhibition and presentation for the Malcolm X Academy school community, Robin photographed each student. He then created I Am Islais posters featuring powerful portraits of each student with their quotes about Islais Creek. The SF Planning Department has shared these posters at community meetings, where they received an enthusiastic response from participants. **Seeing the students' images and words inspired adults to get involved, and many asked Robin to make more posters with their images on them as well.**

During the 2019-20 school year, our adult team is currently working with the same students, who are now in 5th grade. Building upon last year's work, we took on the project question:

***"What are the guiding principles and values for adaptive strategies that will allow our community to thrive now and in the future?"***

To start, the students created models of "pop-up" interpretive exhibit stations featuring scale versions of their I Am Islais posters. Each team designed their station to educate children and adults about the issues associated with sea level rise and climate change.

The students then compiled individual mapping assessments of the current conditions in their neighborhoods and the larger community. We followed this with a group SOC Analysis of Bayview. Collectively the students constructed a critical assessment of the community's

- S**trengths (home, school, church, businesses);
- O**pportunities (clean water, jobs and businesses, recreation for youth; and
- C**hallenges (violence, pollution, dirty neighborhoods).

*Seeing the students' images and words inspired adults to get involved, and many asked Robin to make more posters with their images on them as well.*

As an outgrowth of the SOC Analysis, students generated a set of ten principles to represent aspirations and values that they feel are necessary for the community to thrive in the future.



"We must stop the flooding. It will ruin our city and homes. It will damage infrastructure and the places where people live."



"I am a powerful person. I want you guys to know that being connected is how our community finds its power. We should respect each other!"



[sfplanning.org/project/islais](http://sfplanning.org/project/islais)



**These guiding principles include:**

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Clean, Fresh Water                  | 6. Clean Neighborhoods + Streets |
| 2. Clean Bay Water                     | 7. Thriving Businesses + Jobs    |
| 3. Strong, Vibrant Schools             | 8. Clean, Beautiful Buildings    |
| 4. Peaceful Communities                | 9. Affordable Housing            |
| 5. Abundant Recreational Opportunities | 10. Safety + Wellbeing for All   |

They then created models to represent how each of these ten design and planning principles might be implemented in the Bayview neighborhood and along Islais Creek. The students also created large-scale postcards to graphically represent their aspirations for each principle. They will be sending the postcards, with messages, to policymakers and civic leaders who have the power to influence local and city-wide community development.

**This collaboration embodies Y-PLAN's long and substantive partnership with SF NOMA over the past twelve years in elementary schools in Oakland, San Francisco and Richmond.** It also is one of the pilots launched by the San Francisco Planning Department as part of a system-wide effort to meaningfully engage young people in ongoing community development projects.

*"Engaging with real challenges activates their sense of purpose and imbues them with a sense of pride and an investment in their neighborhoods and community. All of our Y-PLAN elementary collaborations underscore the fact that young children are some of our most active and enthusiastic community members."*

**This initiative reveals how profoundly elementary age students want to learn, act, and contribute. They bring a fresh and optimistic perspective to the table.** They also want to use real professional tools to analyze data, create models, and generate creative, insightful and humane solutions. Engaging with real challenges activates their sense of purpose and imbues them with a sense of pride and an investment in their neighborhoods and community. All of our Y-PLAN elementary collaborations underscore the fact that young children are some of our most active and enthusiastic community members.

When and if school resumes after the statewide COVID-19 shutdown, the students will continue to deepen their work on the guiding principles; will be facilitating workshops with fourth graders to cultivate their leadership skills; and will be presenting refined design and policy recommendations to professionals from AECOM, the infrastructure firm working on Islais Creek, and the SF Planning Department.

**DID YOU KNOW...**

**NEARLY 2,500 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ACROSS MORE THAN 100 CLASSROOMS HAVE CONDUCTED 54 Y-PLAN PROJECTS IN 6 CITIES SINCE 2009.**

by Adriana Preciado, Y-PLAN Sacramento Coordinator, Center for Cities + Schools

### Change of Pace: Making Place

It was 2016, I was 22 years old, after attending 3 different community colleges I had finally transferred into UC Berkeley from Contra Costa College in San Pablo, just a stone's throw away from the ivory tower. Going from community college to one of the best public universities in the world was much more different than I ever expected.

Until then, I spent my life moving between the Central Valley and the Bay Area, I experienced different landscapes and befriended so many different people from various walks of life. So you would think that this would be an easy transition. I knew the area - I had worked in Berkeley for many years in various restaurants, like Brennan's Hofbrau down on Fourth Street at the end of University Avenue. I remember working on the carving line serving turkey plates and corned beef sandwiches, sometimes to the old time barflies and the occasional UC professor, while also balancing my schoolwork and caring for my grandparents. I even attended Berkeley City College for a time.

*“Here I was attending lectures given by professors whose roast beef lunch I probably served up.”*

But this was the first time where I was in a place where I wasn't behind the counter serving others, I wasn't just a passerby chillin', smokin' and runnin' around. **I was actually a University student, attending a school that I wouldn't have thought I would have been good enough to attend.** Here I was attending lectures given by professors whose roast beef lunch I probably served up.

Not even a month into the school year, and I was stir crazy. I needed a way out, some way I could give back to my community. One day I came across Writer Coach Connection, a tutoring program that focuses on helping students improve their writing and critical thinking skills. They needed volunteers at Kennedy High School in Richmond, an industrial city to the north of Berkeley, and so I decided to volunteer.

### Looking Back: A Chance Encounter

Before I could start at Kennedy, I had to jump through some bureaucratic hoops. I was at the West Contra Costa School District getting fingerprinted, and while I was waiting in line, I noticed three women in front of me - one of them was wearing a navy polo shirt with a Cal logo on it. I asked if they were from Cal, and the trio simultaneously answered yes. Not sure why I was compelled to talk to these three women, I told them that I had just transferred this semester. They asked what I was doing here, and I relayed that I was getting fingerprinted so I could be a tutor at Kennedy High School. I told them that I was studying Geography, and the woman in the polo shirt informed me that her sister was also a Geography major.

Deborah McKoy explained that she was a professor who taught a seminar course where UC students engaged with high school students to work together to solve problems in their neighborhood. Amanda Eppley informed me of her position as the Y-PLAN Director at their research center and encouraged me to look into the class. Myrna Ortiz introduced herself as the program manager.

We discussed my academic interests and desire to connect to the wider community and Deborah

enthusiastically entreated me to enroll in her seminar that spring. After that, we separated, and I went on to start my tutoring while keeping the class on my radar for Spring 2017 registration.

### **Reconnecting: Life outside the Bubble**

I loved my trips to Kennedy. It felt good to hop on BART and just relax as I was transported to familiar scenery - sitting on the cracked plastic seats, watching the tagged up walls and murals as we sped past the green belt. **I remember pulling up to Del Norte station and feeling my nerves settle, I was finally out of the bubble, I was at ease, I felt comfortable in my skin, felt more like myself.**

I worked with three young cousins, a sophomore and two juniors. The youngest reminded me a lot of myself, and we bonded over our shared academic struggles. I told him how when I was younger my older brother would make fun of me about not knowing how to read. He was even surprised when I told him that I still struggled, "It takes time and practice! Just like with any sport you have to practice to get better and stronger." He asked me "How did you get into Berkeley then?" I laughed and explained. "I had teachers that took time to help me discover other genres, they encouraged me to write and express myself creatively."

He told me that he liked to rap and that he and his cousins wrote their own music and made videos. I told him that writing out bars and rapping has a similar structure to writing an essay. One of the last assignments I worked on with this group of young men was to write an essay about a person who is influential to them and their peers. They stated historic figures such as Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, but when I asked why these people were influential to them, one of them responded "I don't know, those are the names you always hear." The three young men all agreed that rappers were the people who influenced them. "Perfect! Write about that!"

*"We have been groomed and rewarded to regurgitate any information that was recited to us in our traditional education system."*

**Working with these three young men made me realize the importance of ensuring young people understand that their ideas do matter, their opinions should be expressed and that their voices need to be heard.** We have been groomed and rewarded to regurgitate any information that was recited to us in our traditional education system. Adapting strategies that speak to the experiences of our young people can result in a different kind of educational experience, one that has substance and meaning. It was this experience as a writing coach that helped prepare me for what awaited me in the Y-PLAN spring seminar.

Before that could begin, my grandmother passed away. My hands were wrapped around hers, I whispered in her ear, "You were the first one to hold me when I came into this world, and I will be the last to hold you." The woman who helped raise me, who pushed me to continue my education, was gone and now I would never feel her embrace again. Nearly 70 years ago my grandparents moved from El Paso, TX, to Richmond, CA. My grandmother raised ten kids and for a time worked cleaning hospital rooms in Kaiser of Oakland. As partial founders of the Guadalupanos, my grandparents helped to establish resources for the local Spanish speaking community. **Into their later years they continued to be active members of their community, and as a little girl I was right there working alongside them.** My grandparents always led their life with love, humility and gratefulness and that left a huge impression on every aspect of my life.

### Taken off Course: The Start of Something New

During the spring of 2017, in the Y-PLAN seminar, I had the privilege of working at Oakland's Skyline High School with Mr. Muhammed and the young kings of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) initiative, with BART as our civic client. During that same semester I was also taking a Geography course entitled "Race, Space, and Inequality" taught by Professor Jovan Lewis. The course explored spatial configurations of inequality and poverty in relation to race, and examined these relations within the scope of the built environment. I used what I was learning in Professor Lewis's course to add depth into our discussions with our students at Skyline High School. I wanted our students to really engage with the concept of space and place.

**When does space become a place? And who determines this?**

**How does this look in the context of their lived experiences as they travel to and from school?**

My hope was to demonstrate how viewing the world through a critical geographic lens that analyzes the relationship between social, economic and political constructs of changing landscapes can illuminate the racial-spatial disparities that these young men experience. From housing to transportation to recreation, what is their day to day? And how do they move through these spaces, physically and mentally?

In the fall of 2017, I was asked to be a lead facilitator for the Adult Y-PLAN pilot. **Inspired by my grandparents, I enthusiastically agreed. For one thing, it was a job that didn't require heavy lifting, and two, I would be working with the Richmond community.** Healthy Richmond and Y-PLAN teamed up with LEAP, an adult literacy and GED program, to get adults who were out of the workforce involved in city planning.

*"...one of the city's engineers commended them for their work, but also said that their passion for community safety reminded him of the reason why he got into this line of work, to build healthy, safe and equitable cities."*

Our first year we had a very small but dedicated cohort of 3 people, and John Adams (one of the LEAP instructors) really helped tailor the curriculum to fit the needs of adult learners. Our group had the pleasure of working with the City of Richmond on a project that was working to expand public WiFi along bus routes. After the final presentation of participants' recommendations to the city, one of the city's engineers commended them for their work, but also said that their passion for community safety reminded him of the reason why he got into this line of work, to build healthy, safe and equitable cities.

In consultation with the city, without knowing how it would turn out, we took on a second year. To our surprise, our cohort more than doubled. We partnered with the Employment and Training Department of Richmond to find ways to improve job retention and opportunities to local residents. Our community participants highlighted particular aspects that were not previously considered, like how accessibility to public transportation made it difficult to get to work and at times was unreliable. Some expressed that it was hard to find a job that was accommodating to parents, and the hours interfered with family time, while other members of the cohort were vocal about the lack of resources such as legal and financial assistance for undocumented workers in Richmond.

**Plan for Today: Change of Tomorrow**

By year three, we had a rhythm, but during the middle of our 2019 project our work was disrupted by the wildfires up north, however, our participants took the initiative to go out and talk to local Nystrom residents about the city's redevelopment plans of the dated Nystrom Village Neighborhood. Towards the final stages of our work, a participant went into labor. When she left, **I remember saying to students how this baby is the reason why we are doing this work - we are all here in this room because we care about our community and we want to build a city that is safe and healthy so that newborn baby can grow and thrive.** Although the redevelopment of Nystrom Village is still in the beginning stages, we are working to continue to capitalize on the work of these students. The next challenge that we have faced in previous years is making sure that we are able to see results, as we continue with Healthy Richmond, LEAP and Y-PLAN are working to keep our collective aspirations moving forward.

*"You have to earn the trust of your students;  
you have to see yourself as part of a team."*

Reflecting on these past few years I have had my ups and downs, but one thing that has always kept my spirits up is being in the classroom with my students. Through this journey with Y-PLAN, helping develop the Adult Pilot, and now working as the Coordinator of our Y-PLAN Sacramento district-wide expansion, I have met so many wonderful people. Taking on the challenge of working in Adult Ed has really made me see the complexities of education. People's educational paths come in all different shapes and forms, and working with LEAP and my adult students made me realize this. **I cherish all my Y-PLAN experiences, but Richmond set the tone by molding and shaping the way I approached teaching Y-PLAN all together and ultimately prepared me for our work in Sacramento.** Working with instructors like John Adams at LEAP really molded my style and approach to teaching. I found that rather than using the traditional class instruction, having your students be the "audience" doesn't work in the frame of project-based learning. You have to earn the trust of your students; you have to see yourself as part of a team. As the team captain I took the lead, but I knew that I was also a player and I had to be cognizant of what everyone brought to the table. **With this in mind I began to see my classroom as more of a community of practice.**

I am so grateful to be a part of this work, and I have learned so much from my students, as well as my colleagues. As we continue on **I am hoping that people begin to recognize that community input and participation is a crucial piece that is missing in city planning.** Y-PLAN demonstrates that civic learning and engagement can occur in a variety of classrooms at any level, no matter the age!

**DID YOU KNOW...**

AFTER A 2 YEAR PILOT, **Y-PLAN IS WORKING WITH 12 TEACHERS ACROSS 5 SCHOOLS AND MORE THAN 360 SACRAMENTO STUDENTS IN 2020 ALONE.**

*by Dante Angel Teves Miguel, Jr., UC Berkeley '22*

It has truly been a wonderful, enlightening, and nostalgic experience attending the Y-PLAN event in 2019. I am still in complete shock at how destiny has once again crossed our paths. Witnessing organizers and leaders from local and far communities unify and simulate the process which I once experienced during my high school years was a beautiful and inspiring moment.

*“Y-PLAN is a platform that allows students who face oppression and constant relegation to feel a sense of purpose through a community role.”*

Y-PLAN is a revolutionary program that has mobilized many underprivileged students, those currently in higher education and other pathways, to reflect on the past and focus on what we can do in the present to shape the trajectories of the future. **Y-PLAN has definitely served as one of the significant roots to why I am here at UC Berkeley and applying to the Public Health major.** The Y-PLAN is such a humanizing experience that empowers the youth. I remember in the reflection stage of Y-PLAN, I was asked about how it made me feel. I answered that I felt empowerment and liberation. Y-PLAN is a platform that allows students who face oppression and constant relegation to feel a sense of purpose through a community role.

As a student who practices or simply applies concepts of Y-PLAN in everyday life, I want to empower marginalized groups while simultaneously symbolizing the necessity to include diverse individuals in higher roles. I value representation of people of color in fields like health, because I believe the presence of a trustful role model can inspire younger generations. **Reuniting with those who outreached to my community and home has induced an intellectual awakening for me while simultaneously solidifying my passion for social justice and health equity. I am eternally grateful for the past opportunities provided through Y-PLAN as it has influenced my academic goals and overall lifestyle: a life that is committed to change, community advocacy, and empowerment.**

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## “Y-PLAN Oakland Since 2000”

*by Christia Mulvey, Manager, Housing Department Services, City of Oakland*

**Looking back at my experience since the Y-PLAN course,** I think one of the most challenging things we face in explaining planning to high school students, and in the work itself, is a mismatch in time scales. Planning developments are often the work of years, and sometimes decades, and yet students are feeling the impacts of displacement and gentrification on a much faster time scale.

When I was a grad student working on a Y-PLAN project with Oakland Tech students in 2000, the focus was the MacArthur BART Transit-Oriented Development. I still remember the Tech students complaining that nothing was ever going to happen at that site – development had been under discussion roughly forever to them. It’s only in the last decade that we’ve been able to get the development there on track (including a decent percentage of affordable units), and that’s not entirely unusual for a large-scale, complex development, but: **those high school students are now in their mid-30’s!** In my work, this mismatch has made me appreciate the importance of a development pipeline – we always need to be working on many projects at once to make sure we have a steady stream of affordable housing developments coming on line. And given our funding limitations, it seems that we can never do enough. However, we must keep trying.

by Blanca Gamez-Djokic, Doctoral Candidate,  
UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education

I arrived at the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Education by way of Taipei, Taiwan, where I had been working as a high school English teacher at an international private school for two years. While teaching, I decided to apply for a Ph.D. in Education, feeling that there was more I needed to learn and know about teaching, learning and the history and landscape of equity in education more broadly. I arrived in Berkeley, California in 2013 and began my doctoral studies.

The first three years of my doctoral program were devoted to coursework, building the conceptual and theoretical tools to understand society and critique structural inequality, and slowly shaping my research interests and agenda. Adjusting to the newness of the Bay Area and the challenges of graduate school made it easy for me to shy away from exploring and getting to know the Bay. Additionally, not knowing how to drive made it easy for me to limit the extent of my travel on AC Transit and BART. My daily movements largely involved traveling from home to campus, with the occasional excursion to San Francisco, Oakland, or somewhere further - but only if a friend drove.

*“While my program afforded me a rich and challenging education in theory and content, I struggled to understand how I could use the conceptual tools I learned to engage with my surroundings, to understand the complexities of education as it relates to specificity of place.”*

I quickly realized how the limitations of my mobility impacted not just my sense of belonging and “homeness” in the Bay, but my ability to apply what I was learning on the page in practical and meaningful ways that would enable me to interact thoughtfully and practically with my local contexts – the spaces and places I moved through – and most importantly, the local educational landscape. As a newcomer to the Bay interested in researching teachers and schools, it was difficult for me to find openings into collaborating and working with teachers and schools in a way that was not self-serving or crude. While my program afforded me a rich and challenging education in theory and content, I struggled to understand how I could use the conceptual tools I learned to engage with my surroundings, to understand the complexities of education as it relates to specificity of place. I volunteered as a graduate student mentor with a student-run organization held at the Oakland Boys and Girls Club and funded by a U.C. Innovation Grant, an experience that allowed me to interact with young people locally, and that I enjoyed and learned from. Unfortunately, the funding for this organization was eventually discontinued, and the mentorship program ended.

It was around this time that I saw a call for applications for a Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) position as a Classroom Coach for Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now (Y-PLAN), a learning strategy operating out of the Center for Cities and Schools at U.C. Berkeley. The job description entailed working with young people in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and local civic stakeholders and community organizations, as well as supporting teachers in the implementation of the participatory action research strategy, Y-PLAN. My first projects as a Y-PLAN Coach placed me at Skyline High School in the Oakland Hills, collaborating with two different science teachers, one a physics teacher and the other an environmental science teacher. Three years later, additional projects have taken me to Castlemont High School in East Oakland, McClymonds High School in West Oakland, and Oakland

Technical and Oakland High Schools in Central Oakland. My work with Y-PLAN has required me to move all around Oakland by bus, foot, Lyft/Uber and BART, and I have gotten to know the city from a variety of transit-oriented perspectives, as well as from the perspectives of its youth and the stakeholders whose decisions influence the way we experience and interact with our built environment.

*"Engaging with Y-PLAN has pushed me to be constantly reflexive, to think about how I move through and occupy space and has cultivated a sensitivity to the influence that the built environment has on the way we make meaning and our capacity to flourish as individuals and as a society."*

My work with Y-PLAN has mobilized dimensions of my doctoral experience in the Bay that, prior to my involvement, I had struggled to facilitate in a way that honored entering into research relationships in an equitable and collaborative fashion. Engaging with the tenets of urban planning alongside teachers and students, in schools, while completing my doctoral studies in the Graduate School of Education animated my learning, connecting theory with practice. **More than this, the Y-PLAN strategy has compelled me to see the acts of transit – perhaps otherwise mundane – as important learning moments.** Traveling to different schools, looking out the window of a BART car, a bus, a car, walking through different school campuses, has complicated the lens I bring into my research in a visceral, personal way. Engaging with Y-PLAN has pushed me to be constantly reflexive, to think about how I move through and occupy space and has cultivated a sensitivity to the influence that the built environment has on the way we make meaning and our capacity to flourish as individuals and as a society.

As I continue my doctoral studies and think about the possible impact of my research, I am now mindful of the importance of producing research that contributes **beyond the walls of the academy** and actually has an **impact on the health of our schools, communities and cities.**

### ***DID YOU KNOW...***

**50 SEPARATE Y-PLAN PROJECTS** HAVE ADDRESSED **TRANSPORTATION** CHALLENGES, **65** HAVETACKLED **HOUSING**, AND MORE THAN **100** HAVE REIMAGINED **PUBLIC SPACE.**

## **“Empowering Students and Self via Y-PLAN”**

*by Selena Perez Tejada, Fellow, Center for Cities + Schools*

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I've been with the Center for six years, in three different roles: student, student-worker, and Fellow. I started working at the Center for Cities + Schools the summer after my freshman year at UC Berkeley. Unlike most of my colleagues, I was not first introduced to Y-PLAN through the UC Berkeley class. Instead, I was browsing through the work-study job board when I landed on an announcement for a student assistant for Jeff Vincent at the Center, and I applied and became his assistant for the summer.

When my time was up in that position at the Center, I was able to stay on as a student assistant for 5 hours a week doing administrative work, like printing and copying for Center staff. I managed numerous handouts about Y-PLAN, but I didn't yet understand what it was. It was not until I was approached by Amanda Eppley to be her assistant that I began my journey into Y-PLAN. Amanda (Mandy, to those that know her) recommended I take Deb's City Planning Y-PLAN seminar in the spring so I would understand the context of the work I would be doing. **So there I was, finally about to figure out what Y-PLAN was after working with them for two semesters.**

*“That's the thing with Y-PLAN, you don't really understand what it is until you finish doing a project, and even though you do not completely understand what you are doing the first time, it still works out.”*

I went into class the first day, heard the Y-PLAN overview, and I still didn't get it. That semester, I was part of the mentor group that would go every week to Oakland High School to work with students in the African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMA), and I still did not know what Y-PLAN was. That's the thing with Y-PLAN, you don't really understand what it is until you finish doing a project, and even though you do not completely understand what you are doing the first time, it still works out. If you would like to learn more about my experience at Oakland High, I wrote a mentor blog series about my experience as part of my job with the Center, you can find it [here](#).

I am now a Fellow with the Center, and this year I am running a project at [Escuela Popular](#) (EP) in San Jose. Escuela Popular serves all ages, from 6 months to 100 years old. They have a daycare center for their staff and their students, and they also have K-12 education. Their high school is a newcomers school, and their program from K-8 grade is dual immersion bilingual education. They also have an adult school where adult students can get their GED and learn English.

I started working with Escuela Popular in my senior year of college. **Y-PLAN was leading a two day workshop with middle schoolers at EP, working with MTC on the [Horizon Initiative](#), and fluency in Spanish was needed, so they asked me to help.** Although I was only able to attend one day of the workshop, I was in awe of the structure of the school and the students.

This year, we are doing a semester long project with 8th graders in Escuela Popular. Students are partnering with the community organizations in [Silicon Valley @ Home](#) answering the question of how we can best protect, preserve and produce affordable housing.

A few weeks into our project, the students had already learned so much; and I had learned so much from them. Growing up I experienced housing insecurity. As many other immigrant families in this country, my parents had to move every other year, and I always overheard my parents discussing whether or not we had enough money for rent. We were especially hit hard during the recession, since our house was foreclosed. My parents don't speak English, so it was always my sister's and my job to translate legal paperwork for them. **As is the case with many other immigrant kids, I understood this as part of my normal life: you hear about these problems, and you help your parents through them the best way an eight-year-old can.**

One student at Escuela Popular embodies for me the struggle immigrant families go through to get housing. On the second day that I went into the classroom, we discussed the homelessness spectrum and how homelessness is not just someone living in the streets - it can also be someone who is doubling up with another family. The students didn't really think this was homelessness since the person has a bed, and many of them have experienced it themselves.

*"As someone who has the privilege of an education and to work at an organization with city planners, I knew that this was a systematic problem and that she wasn't the only person experiencing this... As someone who has lived with housing insecurity, I imagined the listings for garage or room rentals posted outside Latin American grocery and liquor stores that my own family would read through when we were starting to have trouble paying rent."*

While I was going around the class to speak to each group, one student asked me if it was legal for a landlord to raise the rents whenever they wanted if you lived in their garage. A lot of things went through my head at once when she asked me this, and I had to try my best not to let it reflect on my face. As someone who has the privilege of an education and to work at an organization with city planners, I knew that this was a systematic problem and that she wasn't the only person experiencing this. I gathered that her family is likely living in a converted garage with their landlord living in the same house. As someone who has lived with housing insecurity, I imagined the listings for garage or room rentals posted outside Latin American grocery and liquor stores that my own family would read through when we were starting to have trouble paying rent. I didn't know how to help her. I am not a city planner, nor do I know housing law. I advised her that there are local community organizations that may help her, but unfortunately I was not well prepared to give her resources. I continued to think of her and her situation.

The next time I went into the classroom, our client Huascar Castro, Policy Associate from Silicon Valley @ Home gave a presentation on the 3P's of affordable housing (production, preservation, and protection) and the challenges cities and organizations face when they are building affordable housing. As an activity we had the students draw their understanding of the problem and what they imagined would be a solution. As the students were drawing, Huascar and I walked around the room to talk to each group about their drawings. The student who spoke with me the week before asked me if I knew of anyone who was renting a garage.

Right away, I understood that to mean that her family is having a difficult time paying rent and is looking for a new place to live. I understand that she is having to take on some of that burden of

having to look for a new home. I don't know if her parents talk to her directly about the problem or if she overhears it; regardless, **she shoulders some of the responsibility of her parents' housing burden.** Again, I did not know the right way to help her. I simply said that she could check Craigslist for listings. One of her group mates also suggested the Facebook Marketplace. They started looking as a group.

*"...reportar al dueño que cobra de más. Hay muchas personas que duermen en el carro o la calle porque no pueden pagar la renta."*

When it was time for students to volunteer to present their drawings, the girl and one of her friends volunteered to present. They did their presentation in Spanish. They had drawn a timeline of a person living in a home where the rent became too expensive, then the person loses their housing because they are no longer able to pay, and finally the person is having to sleep in their car or in a tent.

The students identified the problem as landlords unfairly raising rents and charging an exorbitant amount for a unit that is small and is not well maintained. When we asked them what they imagined the solution to be they said that we need to "reportar al dueño que cobra de más. Hay muchas personas que duermen en el carro o la calle porque no pueden pagar la renta." ("report the owner that overcharges rent. There are many people who sleep in their cars or in the street because they cannot pay rent.") When asked by one of their classmates what they would do if the landlord refused to follow the rules, they replied, like the powerful young women they are, **"lo demandamos"** ("we'll sue them").

*"One of the many reasons why I have loved my work with Y-PLAN is because I have seen students come together and form a community when they realize they are not the only ones who experience their community that way."*

**I was in awe of their power and resolve to seek justice for themselves and others that go through housing insecurity.** Thinking back to when I was their age, I wish I had the understanding that housing insecurity was affecting many of my peers, not just me; and that we could all do something about it by sharing our experiences. One of the many reasons why I have loved my work with Y-PLAN is because I have seen students come together and form a community when they realize they are not the only ones who experience their community that way. When they see the survey results that tell them that many other students are housing insecure, want to move out of their city, or believe there are not enough job opportunities, the students rally behind finding solutions to those shared problems.

***One of the many magics of Y-PLAN is giving young people the tools to form the community they need to create lasting change.***

### ***DID YOU KNOW...***

**SINCE 2015, Y-PLAN STUDENTS HAVE IDENTIFIED AS ABOUT 40% LATINX, 30% AFRICAN AMERICAN, 15% ASIAN, 10% MORE THAN 1 RACE, AND 5% WHITE**

Hi, my name is Elizabeth Aviles, and I'm 18 years old. I was born in Fresno, CA, but I was raised in the Bay Area since I was four years old. Currently, I live in East Palo Alto and attend UC Merced. The Bay Area is a pricey area to live, and it is not easy. For years, I moved around different households because of my dad's job and rent. Living with five brothers, two of which have their own families, along with my parents, has its ups and downs.

Growing up, I was always into any type of art. I love to have an open mind when I learn something new. Music has had a huge impact in my life, and it's a way for me to cope with my emotions. Aside from that, I love to keep myself active and try to help others with what I can. Y-PLAN has given me the opportunity to take action and help my community the way I always wanted to.

Y-PLAN was introduced to me by my STEM teacher, Hanna Kurowski, in my junior year of high school at East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy (EPAPA). Although I was a bit skeptical at first - I wasn't sure that the Y-PLAN team would return after introducing themselves - my perspective has changed a lot since then. I saw that Ms. Kurowski, Mandy and Deb, and other Y-PLAN staff members wanted to contribute to the East Palo Alto community, and they wanted to try their best to have kids like me be involved.

The whole class was assigned different categories of what makes a community, such as school, housing, etc. I was assigned to focus on areas of improvements for transportation with a few other classmates. Time and gathering research information was a process as it wasn't always easy. It takes a lot of people with their ideas to make a change no matter how big or small it is, but in the end, we presented our proposal with pride.

Youth, Plan, Learn, Act, Now is an acronym that is accomplishing its purpose. To give the youth a voice and to show them that they are involved, too. Y-PLAN stayed with my school for a summer internship and returned the following school year. East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy was a small school, and I had been a part of it since I was in kindergarten. My graduating class had only 18 students. For my senior year, there were some challenges, and unfortunately, the high school was closed down because of the lack of students attending. Mine was the last class to graduate.

*“Thank you Y-PLAN for still sticking around, as we all just want a better life and a better community to live it in.”*

Y-PLAN has been part of the glue and provided a boost that pulled my involvement and education with the community together, even as my school was forced to close. I have noticed our community slowly coming together as we were given the chance to present our work to others, especially adults. I have learned a lot as they have brought my presentation and social networking skills to the test. Y-PLAN makes sure young people are recognized. We just need adults to guide us. Thank you Y-PLAN for still sticking around, as we all just want a better life and a better community to live it in.

***We can't improve our community without being ourselves.***

This book contains a collection of reflections contributed by just a few of the tens of thousands of individuals over the last two decades from the Y-PLAN community of practice who have learned first hand the truth of the statement  
*“Once a Y-PLANner, always a Y-PLANner.”*

We would like to **thank everyone whose work is included in this collection** for sharing your stories, and the **entire current CC+S Y-PLAN team** for helping to review it.

We **invite all members of the 20 year Y-PLAN community of practice to share your stories** with us, as we continue to reflect throughout this 20th anniversary year, by illuminating the myriad impacts Y-PLAN has had on all of us, as we **plan healthier, more resilient, vibrant, equitable, and joyful cities, together.**



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