

An Evaluation of the Youth Action Program (The Precursor to Youth-Create) and its Apparent Power to Promote Life-Long Thriving

Elena Maker Castro, Ph.D.

December 1, 2023

“I think in this weird way, these experiences that I had when I was 14 years old, 14, 15 years old, really, really had a long range impact and I think that it would behoove any city government or federal government to take a look at that, and make more.”

- Kelly

“That fire of, ‘we can transform this, we can change this’, definitely came from my experiences at Youth Action Program. The whole idea that we can change society came from there.”

- MaryKay Penn

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the late 1970’s, an organization called the Youth Action Program (YAP) was developed in East Harlem, NY to organize teenagers to learn to work together to create community improvement projects of their own design, to solve problems they prioritized, and create new assets or opportunities in their neighborhood. The idea was that they had untapped energy, intelligence, and insights that could make a difference if they were respected, encouraged, and resourced to bring their ideas into reality. Doing so would involve engaging other teenagers and local residents, as well as local and even national government and policy makers. The overall process was intended to help improve young people’s communities and their own ability to thrive.

This report was undertaken to determine whether a modern replication of the Youth Action Program would be valuable. The Youth Action Program was an unusual project, not widely known, and not replicated at the time. The question to be answered by this study was whether it made enough of a positive difference to be launched again in this era. This report aims to inform current youth organizers and funders by highlighting the voice and perspectives of former YAP members as they recount the impact that their YAP participation had on their lives in the 45 years since their original participation. The researcher, Elena Maker Castro, Ph.D., used interview and focus group methodology to gather in-depth qualitative data on 11 former YAP members’ experiences and reflections. Through thematic analysis of the data, recurring themes surfaced to highlight the powerful impact of YAP on participants’ lifelong journeys, including:

- **Opportunities to be Seen and Heard, Taken Seriously, and Respected, Led to Confidence and a Stronger Sense of Agency**

Through internal (e.g., leading youth councils) and external (e.g., advocating with elected officials) civic opportunities, plus the collaborative creation of tangible projects that benefited their community, participants were able to exercise their voices and build their sense of efficacy, empowerment, and hope. As low income youth of color, participants explained how important and transformative it was for their concerns and goals for their community to be taken seriously, and implemented

- **Spaces of Safety and Caring Responsive Adults Helped Young People Overcome Adversity and Establish Healthy Lives**

Adults who were part of YAP were integral to providing stability to YAP's various youth-led projects and an environment where youth felt safe and cared for. Many participants were able to overcome serious developmental obstacles, like substance abuse and potential gang affiliation, with the support of YAP adults who centered their needs and gave them a space where they could heal and make positive life choices.

- **Opportunities to Question Led to Stronger Critical Reflection and Commitment to Social Change**

Youth in YAP developed a critical lens to view both their local and global communities. They also developed a stronger critical lens on the U.S. political system. Through becoming conscious across local, global, and political dimensions, they felt compelled to engage in civic change.

- **Opportunities to Act Led to Greater Leadership and Careers in Public Service**

Through participating in youth-driven civic action as adolescents, participants were able to develop the skills and motivation needed to continue engaging civically. Participants cited YAP as the formative influence on their life-long commitments to social change, and participants explained how their careers in public service began at YAP.

Findings from the study suggest that YAP powerfully shaped young people's lives through cultivating an environment where youth felt safe, deeply respected, and empowered. These formative experiences had significant effects on members' lives. Their participation in YAP was a very different experience from what was happening in schools, at home, or in their neighborhoods, and many participants considered how different their lives would have been had it not been for YAP. The report concludes that youth programming of the type offered by

YAP can have positive, long-term implications on lifespan development not often illuminated in the extant youth civic engagement literature.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Civic Development and Why Is It Important?

Civic development refers to the development of “the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and inclinations for full participation in political and community life” (Malin et al., 2015, p. 103). Civic development can have cascading effects on other realms of development (e.g., cognitive development, socioemotional wellbeing, career trajectories; Ballard & Wray-Lake 2023; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016). I draw from three theories of civic development to guide our understanding of how YAP might have supported young people and their long-term ability to thrive. These three frameworks (i.e., positive youth development, sociopolitical development, and psychological empowerment theory) are conceived as complementary to one another and as collectively addressing how young people can become active, engaged citizens and community members.

One way to conceptualize civic development is through PYD, or positive youth development. PYD is often measured through the 6 C’s (i.e., confidence, caring, character, connection, competence, and contribution; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Lerner, 2005; Tyler et al., 2019). Collectively, these developmental dimensions are intended to provide a strengths-based measure of whether a young person is developing the assets needed to contribute to one’s community, and to live well (Gonzalez et al., 2020). A cornerstone of PYD scholarship is a focus on youths’ strengths, as well as the strengths of the contexts within which youth live, with the ultimate aim of identifying how different youth-context interactions support thriving into adulthood (Ferrer-Wreder, 2014). In other words, a PYD approach to studying the Youth Action Program allows us to consider both how members developed as well as to consider how the context supported their development.

Importantly, when youth are able to foster capacities like confidence and caring, their wellbeing benefits (Maker Castro et al., 2022). PYD may be particularly important for youth contending with poverty, racism, and/or other systemic barriers. Prior research has found that at-risk youth involved in multiple service systems (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice) who were also enrolled in programs supportive of their PYD reported resilience and stronger wellbeing (e.g., greater satisfaction with life) than peers not enrolled in PYD programs (Sanders et al., 2015). Meanwhile, in a recent longitudinal study, researchers found that Black youth who grew up in an impoverished Chicago neighborhood in the 1980s and participated in a PYD program reported better educational and financial outcomes roughly 16 years after participation than their peers who were not involved in such programming (Sheehan et al., 2022).

Young people of color who grow up poor in the USA face systemic barriers to civic participation (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). As these young people become involved in civic life and consider how they can improve their communities, they may contend with systemic injustices (e.g., neighborhood redlining, school underfunding). Importantly, if they work within PYD-related

programs while encountering injustices, this may be more likely to foster the sense of connection and support from peers and program facilitators that can support them through the difficulty of confronting marginalizing systems (Sulé et al., 2021; Ortega-Williams & Harden, 2022).

Sociopolitical development theory offers a framework for understanding how young people facing structural inequities like housing segregation and under-resourced schools develop their abilities to transform their circumstances through political and civic action (Watts et al., 2003). Sociopolitical development is commonly evaluated using the three dimensions of critical consciousness: critical reflection (i.e., understanding and analysis of systemic oppression), sociopolitical efficacy (i.e., one's sense of ability and motivation to address systemic oppressions), and critical action (i.e., participation in efforts to individually and/or collectively change systemic oppressions; Heberle et al., 2020). Critical action can take many forms, including participation in electoral politics, service to one's community, and traditional forms of advocacy and protest (Suzuki et al., 2022; Maker Castro et al., 2022). These three dimensions are conceived to be reciprocal, such that development along one dimension informs others (Heberle et al., 2020). For example, youth engaged in civic action programs may learn more about social inequalities, which may catalyze efforts to address them; these actions may offer additional opportunities to learn more deeply about inequalities.

Sociopolitical development can occur within the context of PYD programs, consequently supporting youths' PYD (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). In other words, when youth facing marginalizing systems (e.g., low-income youth of color) enter PYD programs that support their analysis and actions to change social inequalities, both their sociopolitical development and PYD benefit (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Maker Castro et al., 2022). For example, Black adolescents and young adults who participated in a PYD program wherein they fostered elements of their sociopolitical development were able to build a sense of community, self-love, and agency (or rather, elements that supported their PYD; Sulé et al., 2021).

Psychological empowerment theory is a theory that helps bridge our understanding of *why* sociopolitical development supports PYD. Psychological empowerment theory offers an alternative, often parallel, conceptualization to sociopolitical development of the ways in which individuals and communities gain control over their environments and build power to enact change (Rappaport, 1987; Christens et al., 2016). Psychological empowerment theory is similarly delineated by different components; the emotional component in particular offers an important complement to sociopolitical development theory. This component focuses on how youth develop a sense of hopefulness regarding their sociopolitical action, and suggests that young people can develop a sense of perceived and actual control of their circumstances which helps them problem-solve through adverse circumstances (Christens et al., 2013). For young people experiencing marginalization first hand (e.g., youth of color, and any youth raised in poverty) participation in efforts to improve living conditions and opportunities for their communities may evoke a greater sense of hope and control over their circumstances (Christens et al., 2013).

This sense of hope and control can motivate young people to overcome the systemic disadvantages bred within contexts of systemic racism and poverty among all races (Christens et al., 2013; Maker Castro et al., 2022). Indeed a sense of hope and ability to take control of one's life may undergird both sustained efforts to learn and redress social inequality, as well as one's sense of confidence, caring, connection, character, competence, and ultimately, contribution.

When taken together, we begin to see that youth civic development is multifaceted and takes on different shapes, depending on their goals, experiences, and general contexts. In this study, we work across theories and constructs in order to build a robust and multilayered picture of what youth civic development looked like in the context of the Youth Action Program, and what lessons might be learned from its extraordinary impact.

The Youth Action Program

How It Started:

In 1978, the Community Anti-Crime Program (CACP) of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration was offering substantial grants for community-based initiatives designed to prevent crime by engaging community residents in activities designed by themselves. The initiative emerged from legislation created by Congressman John Conyers, an African American from Detroit, who deeply understood how low-income communities could help diminish crime by engaging their own people in community solutions. Dorothy Stoneman applied for and won a CACP grant to establish the Youth Action Program under the sponsorship of the East Harlem Block Schools. This grant, of about \$220,000, enabled her to hire 9 staff members (back then, the annual salary was \$11,000) to generate 9 youth-led community improvement projects in East Harlem between 1978 and 1984. (A 100 page report on the process and results of the grant is in the archives of the Department of Justice.)

Stoneman had lived and worked in Central Harlem and East Harlem for 14 years prior to submitting this proposal. She started as a Civil Rights volunteer in 1964 in the Harlem Action Group, a local project of the Northern Student Movement. She organized a summer preschool for 60 children who had missed kindergarten. This project engaged teenagers as classroom assistants. She then taught second grade in PS 92 in the same Central Harlem neighborhood. Given the frustrations of teaching in the public school, with 30 restless young students crammed into a classroom with just one teacher, she soon moved to the East Harlem Block Schools, a unique parent-controlled school started under the Anti-Poverty program, where the parents hired the teachers, the entire board of directors was made of low-income parents, and two parent assistant teachers supported each classroom teacher. The school was a superb community of collaboration and caring. The parents hired Stoneman as a Head Start teacher. After a year, they promoted her to Head Start Director. In 1969 they made her Executive Director, overseeing two day care centers (the Head Start programs had obtained City funds as public day care centers) and an independent public elementary school.

During these 14 years Stoneman had witnessed both good and bad things. She saw the energy, intelligence, and passion of teenagers eager to contribute to the Civil Rights movement. She saw the impact on teenagers of ongoing poverty, stressed out parents, societal disrespect, personal hopelessness, and dangerous street life. One of her very talented 2nd grade students died tragically in his early teens in street violence. At the Block Schools she saw the power of engaging and empowering low-income marginalized young parents to run their own school and become trained themselves as teachers. Everywhere she saw both the desperate need of teenagers for an escape from the poverty, abuse, addictions, crime, gangs, and violence they were exposed to daily; and she saw the potential of teenagers becoming a powerful force for good if their intelligence and vision were supported and resourced so they could create solutions to the problems they witnessed every day.

Stoneman's idea of starting the Youth Action Program was to create a pathway for low-income teenagers out of poverty and into productive leadership, and to demonstrate YAP as an initiative to be spread across the country as a solution to the widespread plight of teenagers growing up in communities of concentrated poverty. The fundamental process would be to ask the young people what they loved about their community, what they would like to change or create, and then help them find the wherewithal to do just that. **Each project would be youth-led, adult-supported.**

How It Developed

True to the Block Schools' basic philosophy of reversing traditional power relationships in order to create equal partnerships between historically more powerful and less powerful groups, Stoneman set up a hiring committee of youth. They became what was called the Policy Council, described by many of the interviewees in this research. Together with Dorothy, they hired one administrative assistant and seven community organizers who would each work with a different group of teenagers on a different block to create a unique community improvement project of their own design.

Once hired and prepared, the organizers set out to find groups of teenagers. Great ideas for projects emerged on every block: a playground and public park on 103rd Street; a Home Away From Home for young single mothers and their children on 118th Street; a Leadership High School on 110th Street; the Youth Action Restoration Crew, to rehabilitate abandoned buildings on 119th Street; the Johnson Housing Projects Youth Patrol to prevent crime in the projects on 112th Street; Hotline Cares – an emergency telephone line staffed by teenagers for young people throughout the neighborhood needing immediate assistance, with its headquarters on 112th Street; a Peer Counseling project that offered neighborhood youth therapeutic support through peer relationships under the guidance of a trained professional staffer; and the Youth Forum, which led the advocacy and public policy initiatives for YAP, evolving later into the East Harlem Youth Congress.

Each block's project was, in its own way, original, state of the art, emerging directly from the ideas and vision of the young people in their own neighborhood. Each project was implemented with ingenuity and dedication by the organizer, supported by Stoneman in various ways, most especially through fundraising and encouraging fealty to the philosophy of respect for the ideas of the young people including perpetuating the role of the youth Policy Council in making key decisions for the overall organization. Teenagers representing each block's project served on the Policy Council as the central decision-making group.

Once all the projects were launched, Youth Action began to organize neighborhood-wide conferences, in collaboration with other local organizations. The theory was that once the teenagers had a stake in something they had created on their block, they would be open to understanding the relationship of their block to the community, and to the local government. They would have developed the confidence to look beyond the immediate neighborhood and imagine what more they might do. These larger conferences led to YAP creating The East Harlem Youth Congress, through which the young people produced a Youth Agenda for the Eighties that was a broad platform for change in the community developed by the teenagers, largely from their own ideas but also informed by their deep conversations with stakeholders throughout the community.

There was a key moment in the early eighties when the Reagan administration canceled certain streams of funding, and Dorothy had to turn to the young people and say, "We can no longer go to the federal government. We will have to get funding from the City. We will have to learn how to advocate for funding from the City Council." YAP did that. YAP organized a coalition of 150 organizations in NYC, brought 200 young people to the budget hearings and to lobby their Councilmembers during the budget process. As a result, in 1984 YAP helped win over \$4M from the City for the programs they recommended, and in 1985 over \$12M. (See the appendix A for the East Harlem Youth Agenda for the Eighties. It reflects conditions that still continue today, and lays out a dramatic, community-based blueprint for change, with a series of proposed solutions.)

Where It Ended Up Going

Forty years later, the Youth Action Program still operates in East Harlem. It spun off from the sponsorship of the East Harlem Block Schools in 1986, and became Youth Action Programs and Homes, Inc. Between 1984 and 1990, it launched a city-wide and then national effort to replicate one of YAP's original projects, the Youth Action Restoration Crew (YARC). YARC was the project started on 119th Street by the teenagers who said they wanted to hire the unemployed youth to rehabilitate the abandoned buildings to create housing for the homeless. At that time in East Harlem there were several hundred abandoned buildings. It was prior to the period of gentrification; the old landlords were walking away from their buildings as local conditions and the economy unraveled, and the City was taking them over. Those dilapidated, vacant, City-owned tenement buildings were a plague on the community. There were also a lot of idle

teenaged boys, many starting to use and sell drugs, and there were many unhoused people. The teenagers had a vision for fixing all three problems at once.

YARC was extremely successful. That is a long story unto itself – how the first buildings were obtained, the funds raised through City and State advocacy, the rehabilitation done by teenagers, the out-of-school teenagers recruited to get both their high school education and job training through YARC, and the housing provided to homeless mothers. By the mid-1980s, the YARC role was integrated into YAP when it spun off from East Harlem Block Schools as Youth Action Homes, Inc. During the longer period of 1979-2006, Youth Action would carry out gut rehabilitation to produce 130 units of affordable housing, 124 of which are still rented as permanent low income housing for the community, owned and managed by what became Youth Action Programs and Homes, Inc., aka Youth Action YouthBuild.

Because YARC addressed several key issues facing the community – housing deterioration, homelessness, education, job training, and violence – Stoneman thought this project would be the best one to replicate nationally. Between 1988 and 1992, Youth Action led a National Replication Project, funded largely by private funds, that established 20 similar projects around the country. It was renamed YouthBuild in 1990 when Stoneman founded YouthBuild USA, Inc., as the national non-profit dedicated to spreading this model. YouthBuild USA then organized the National YouthBuild Coalition which succeeded in getting legislation passed in 1992 authorizing federal funding for YouthBuild programs through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Since then a steady stream of federal funding, first from HUD and later from the US Department of Labor (DOL) has gone out through annual competitions to over 250 local nonprofit and public entities that have engaged over 200,000 low-income 16 to 24 year olds in the production of over 35,000 units of affordable housing. The program was focused on students who had left high school without a diploma, so the YouthBuild program was structured to include 50% of the time for the students to work toward their own GED, and the other 50% was spent building the housing. YouthBuild is a highly successful federal program for the group now frequently called “Opportunity Youth” – because they are seeking opportunity and they offer an opportunity to our nation if we would invest in them.

However, the basic YAP process of organizing young teenagers to produce a variety of community improvement projects of their own design, was never replicated. Stoneman and a group of former Opportunity Youth who are now leading in their communities have launched a new effort under the Office of American Possibilities within the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, to replicate that process in the current era. The need still exists. This research was done to assess whether such a replication would be valuable and worthwhile, based on the experience of original Youth Action participants.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Young people's participation in civic action programs may be transformative for youth development within and beyond the domain of civic development. Indeed, youth participation in civic action programs may have long-lasting impacts on life trajectories, including long-term civic endeavors. Using a qualitative approach, the current study seeks to explore prior Youth Action Program participants' reflections of the long-term impact of their experiences in the program when they were adolescents and young adults in the 1970's and early 1980's. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do former members of the Youth Action Program perceive the short and long-term impacts of YAP participation on their life trajectories?
2. What elements of the Youth Action Program do former members see as most salient for their development within and beyond adolescence and young adulthood?

Method

Sample

The sample of interviewees included eleven former YAP participants, two of whom were former young adult staff members. Nine of the interviewees also completed demographic surveys. Among the nine participants who completed surveys ($M_{age} = 63$), four identified as female/woman and five identified as male/man. The sample included three participants who identified their race/ethnicity as Black/African American, two as Latino/Hispanic, two as Puerto Rican, one as multiracial and one as white. Two participants identified as first or second generation immigrants (meaning either they, or one/both of their parents moved to the United States.) The majority of participants ($n = 5$) described their families' financial situation when they were young people as "we had a hard time buying the things we needed", while two described their families' financial situation as "we had just enough money for the things we needed and two reported "we had no problem buying the things we needed, and could sometimes buy special things."

Procedures

This study was conducted by a youth civic engagement researcher, Elena Maker Castro, contracted by former YAP director Dorothy Stoneman. Elena completed a multi-step process to familiarize herself with YAP before beginning data collection and analysis. Elena initially met twice with Dorothy to discuss the organization, and she read the 100 page detailed report of YAP in the CACP archives, written by Dorothy in 1981. Elena and Dorothy then held an initial meeting with six former YAP participants and one former staff member to collectively reflect on participants' experiences in YAP. Elena and Dorothy identified initial themes from this conversation, and these observations and themes undergirded the development of the

semi-structured interview protocol. As Elena developed the protocol, she sought feedback from Dorothy and former YAP members. She conducted an interview with one participant and made minor adjustments based on that participant's feedback.

The interview protocol was subsequently used to guide the other ten interviews. Interviews lasted between 30-70 minutes, with an average length of about 50 minutes. Elena observed that many experiences and developmental outcomes were common among participants, suggesting that she was reaching saturation in the interview pool. Interviews were thus stopped after 11 participants. The interviews were transcribed using a professional transcription service and reviewed for quality. Elena conducted thematic analysis (described below) on the interview data. She drafted out the major findings and shared a draft report with all interviewees. Interviewees were able to provide feedback and nuance to the findings in a final member-checking meeting. Five YAP members participated in the final member-checking meeting and their feedback was integrated into the final report.

Analytic Approach

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019) was used to guide analysis, and an inductive-deductive approach to coding (Creswell, 2013) was used to facilitate theory-driven and data-driven codes and thematic findings (Creswell, 2013). To create a codebook, Elena first immersed herself in two transcripts to develop initial descriptive codes. She iteratively "chunked" descriptive codes together and drafted an initial inductive codebook. She then reviewed two additional transcripts to aid in codebook refinement. At this point, descriptive codes were organized into superordinate themes using an inductive-deductive approach to account for theorized forms of civic development and novel observations from the data. Elena reviewed the working codebook with Dorothy and then started systematically coding the data. At this point, only minor adjustments to codes were made.

Upon completing the coding, Elena iteratively analyzed the coded data. She used analytic tools on the coding software platform Dedoose to see which codes were most prominent in the data. The data coded with the most prominent codes were pulled (e.g., "lifelong trajectories" and "political consciousness"). She reviewed the coded excerpts and began organizing the findings into broader themes. She used her notes and outlining to construct the final themes. The themes were reviewed and further refined via a member-checking process wherein interviewees could review and nuance identified themes. In a couple of places, participants made small revisions to their initial quotes for clarity. Participants could choose to use either their names or pseudonyms in the report; all but one chose to use their name.

FINDINGS

YAP catalyzed cascading effects on participants' lives during and well beyond their youth. (As a note, "participants" is the term used in the findings to refer to the eleven interview participants,

which included nine former youth members and two former young adult staff members.) Ten out of the eleven participants crafted careers in public service. The one participant who did not share about a life in public service inspired by YAP also participated the least amount of time in YAP.

Below, the report delves more deeply into the ingredients that made YAP impactful not just during adolescence, but over participants' lifespan. Specifically, I focus on four elements of YAP (i.e., opportunities to be seen and heard, responsive staff who created spaces of safety and care, opportunities to question, and opportunities to act) that supported different dimensions of civic development (i.e., a strong sense of agency, critical reflection and commitment to social change, community leadership, and careers in public service) as well as a sense of wellbeing that allowed participants to pursue their civic development. See Table 1 for overview of the processes, program elements, and developmental outcomes highlighted in the findings.

Table 1. YAP Programmatic Elements and Associated Developmental Outcomes

YAP Programmatic Process	Specific Programmatic Elements	Developmental Outcomes
Opportunities to be seen and heard, taken seriously, and respected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal leadership opportunities (e.g., Policy Committee) • External leadership opportunities (e.g., advocating with city officials for funding) 	Confidence and a stronger sense of agency
Responsive adults who created spaces of safety and care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating stability while centering youth voice • Meeting concrete developmental needs to feel safe (e.g., securing shelter, addressing substance abuse) 	Ability to establish healthy lives
Opportunities to question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth discussions to foster critical reflection (e.g., discussions to foster political consciousness) • Providing alternative pathways (i.e., illustrating a new way of being for youth) 	Stronger critical reflection and commitment to social change
Opportunities to act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating tangible impacts (e.g., creating policy changes through advocacy; producing tangible community improvement projects) 	Greater leadership and careers in public service

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalization of YAP values and practices through repeated exposure 	
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Opportunities to be Seen and Heard, Taken Seriously, and Respected, Led to Confidence and a Stronger Sense of Agency

Through internal (e.g., participating in youth councils) and external (e.g., advocating with elected officials) civic opportunities, participants were able to exercise their voices and build their sense of efficacy, empowerment, and hope. As low income youth of color, participants explained how important and transformative it was for their concerns and goals for their ideas and their community to be taken seriously.

Internal Leadership Opportunities

YAP operated via youth governance committees, the most prominent being the Policy Committee, where youth participants came together across their different projects to govern the organization. Young people were constantly directing programmatic decisions, including the hiring and firing of adult staff. Rey described YAP's philosophy on hiring and how that informed his sense of ownership over his community:

The policy committee decided on employment issues. They decided who the program will hire, who the program will fire. I mean, there were situations where us, as young people, we had to make decisions to let people go. You don't see that in the real world, but that was part of the program. That was part of what she [Dorothy Stoneman] wanted, to, I guess, have us understand ownership.

Chantay similarly described how her experience steering the direction of YAP via the Policy Committee built her sense of leadership. Chantay learned that with leadership came responsibility, and that lesson has stayed with her throughout her life.

It was very empowering to me, it was a very different way to think. Thinking you have power as opposed to being a victim or even worse, invisible. I liked being part of the conversation. I liked feeling like my thoughts had an impact that was good for the people around me. I didn't like it at points, because we were involved in everything, we had to decide whether we were going to fire someone. And that's how I learned about responsibilities and rights. It was... like, oh, so you can have a lot of power, but there's responsibility that goes with that and that doesn't feel good. And so I think that's been a lifelong lesson for me ... that balance of being responsible and also being in leadership.

Notably, Chantay began her reflection with an emphasis on empowerment and feeling seen, and thus we also see how feeling heard and seen entwined with opportunities to act to create transformative youth development experiences.

External Leadership Opportunities

The opportunity to be seen and heard also extended beyond the confines of YAP programming. One of the defining features of YAP was the opportunity to access and influence decision makers. Participants shared ways in which they felt seen and heard through their community organizing and advocacy to elected officials. Importantly, being seen and heard by elected officials countered broader stereotypes and common narratives about youth of color in East Harlem, helping both the elected officials and the YAP participants to see themselves in a new light: Chantay explained what made her feel empowered and agentic:

Having people pay attention and to invite us to be part of steering committees and to be able to speak to them about our perception of what we needed to see in our community, in terms of education, jobs, the ability of adults to recognize us as people and not predators.

When later reviewing the findings, Chantay resonated with the importance of agency, expounding:

This sense of I can control me, I can control things that happen around me, I can impact change in my community, and I have power... For young Black and Hispanic poor young folk to be able to feel those things in and of itself is a miracle.

Here, Chantay connected her experiences of race and class to her sense of empowerment and noted the tremendous odds against which YAP was able to help foster agency for low-income youth of color. Later on in the focus group, Chantay also underscored the role of *collective* agency in particular, or the sense that together, youth could make change. Chantay shared, "We saw ourselves as a movement. We saw ourselves as a force for social change. We didn't see ourselves as a program." Chantay's emphasis on movement instead of program suggests that young people felt part of something greater than themselves, and this feeling of momentum encouraged further civic participation.

MaryKay Penn explicitly used the language of agency to describe her new sense of power and voice through community organizing:

Agency. Yes. That's the first thing it taught is you have agency in this community, in this society. It's not just you being a powerless little clog being slapped around. You get together with other people and you go and you visit Angelo Del Toro, the Assemblyman, and he's looking at people who all can vote at that point. We're 18, 19, 20.

It has an impact. The teaching of agency, I think, is a really, really important piece of their work.

MaryKay's reflection about developing agency at a young age echoes Chantay's earlier comments about how she transformed her sense of powerlessness to empowerment. Together, both former YAP members are able to illustrate how important one's sense of capability to make change is in undergirding a sustained commitment to action.

Johnny Rivera similarly recounted how he learned that he could hold elected officials accountable: "To hold them [elected officials] accountable was something that was becoming part and parcel of the experience of just what we do, what we did." As Johnny learned to engage with these elected officials, he saw that his work with YAP "was cultivating our sense of voice that we had something to say, helping us think through issues and so on." Johnny's experiences building his voice in YAP "really affected me personally throughout my life. This is how I operate." Similarly, Kelly stated that her time at YAP "gave us the confidence to operate in the world with this sense of 'I could make change any way that I want, I could help affect change, I could be a leader and my ideas matter.'"

As young people learned that their voices mattered and that they had agency over their situations, they would exercise their power both within and beyond YAP. David, the young adult staff member interviewed as part of this study, detailed a scenario wherein his own leadership as a staff member was rightfully challenged by the youth participants.

David remembered how he had attended a meeting at the World Trade Center along with two YAP youth, to review the details on a \$40,000 NYS grant to complete the construction of the original YARC building, at 2328 Second Avenue. But the Assemblyman's staffer said it was only fair for YARC to help the Assemblyman by gathering signatures for his political campaign; it was a demand in exchange for the application to be endorsed and funded. Seeking some common ground, David said that he would be willing to pass along the option to the YARC youth, some of whom might be willing to carry the petitions. But upon leaving the meeting, David recalled how two of the teenagers turned to him and said:

What was that all about? Why are you making deals with these people, these political deals? Why are you selling out the young people in the program that they're going to do electoral petitions for an assemblyman, in exchange for him giving us a grant which is public money that we deserve to get anyway? We wrote a good proposal, we are doing a great job, we have nearly finished renovating our building; we deserve to get the funds with no backroom deals.

The next day, David and Dorothy held a meeting with all the young people. With 30-35 people in the room, David remembered how one of the teenaged leaders started by advising him: "Don't say a word. Just listen." Each person then "spoke in turn about how the program should not be selling out its soul and all the values it stands for to a politician for a grant." David

realized the importance of their view and agreed. Then they all walked straight to the politician's local office, and clarified to him that there could be no deal. David's story illuminated how, from the staff perspective, young people were able to center their voices and opinions within and beyond YAP's internal workings. And the sweet coda to the story is that a few days later, when the word came down that the NYS funds had been blocked by the Assemblyman, YARC aggressively shut down a street, used a local DJ's speaker system to inform the community about the Assemblyman's interference with the needed funding, and within an hour a representative of the Manhattan Borough President arrived to confirm that NYC would provide the remaining \$40K to complete the building renovation. That is how the first ever YouthBuild project found its way to completion.

In sum, participants' civic work helped them to develop a sense of agency and direction in life, and ultimately, a sense of hope. Hope helped to sustain agency -- participants were able to not only feel capable to change their community, but were able to cultivate the internal resource of hope to further fuel them. M. Gladman described how this sense of hopefulness was in direct opposition to what many of their community members felt:

Well, I would say that hopelessness... a lot of what we see in the attitudes of a lot of community residents... is hopelessness. Because they just feel, 'I'm here. There's nothing I can really do to change my environment.' In fact, that's not true. It takes work, but you can, if you know the avenues, if you know how to do grassroots organizing, if you know how to interact with your elected officials and really know the political process, what it really is like; if you learn about fundraising, you change them, you move from a perspective of hopelessness to a perspective of having hope.

Responsive Adults Who Created Spaces of Safety and Care Supported Youths' Ability to Establish Healthy Lives

Adults who were part of YAP were integral to providing stability to YAP's various youth-led projects and an environment where youth felt safe and cared for. Many participants were able to overcome serious developmental obstacles, like substance abuse and potential gang affiliation, with the support of YAP adults who centered their needs and gave them a space where they could heal and make positive life choices.

Creating Stability While Centering Youth Voice

Structurally, YAP was created to help youth build their agency and voice, question the world around them, and facilitate thoughtful and informed youth-led civic action. These programmatic structures were upheld by adult staff, and YAP staff became a key ingredient in supporting not just participants' civic development but their overall wellbeing. Indeed, in the focus group, YAP members wanted to make clear that adults offered a source of "continuity" and "credibility." Adults were able to continue working on projects as youth moved to different schools, neighborhoods and projects. Adults were also useful when YAP youth sought funding

for their projects, as someone over 18 needed to help manage the money. David further emphasized:

We almost come off as a little bit of a panacea if we say, just give the young people a chance to do something... That's not really the case, especially when you're talking about 12, and 13, and 14, 16 year old young people. They need some adult backup to get stuff done.

David went on to clarify that YAP was still radical in its commitment to centering youth voice and agency:

We're still a radically different organization when we talk about young people playing leadership roles, young people bringing the agenda, young people framing the programs, evaluating, leading, but to imply that they're doing it without adults or in spite of the adults is not a good way to go.

The adults involved with YAP were not only influential in helping the program maintain momentum as youth came and left, but they were also pivotal in fostering a caring socioemotional environment, or as Chantay put it, the adults held “the culture” and enforced the idea that “we don’t practice adultism in this community.” (“Adultism” refers to the attitudes and actions based on the belief that adults are better than young people and are expected to control and discipline them. In a youth development organization, it unconsciously gives the adults the right to act without young people’s engagement or approval. Staff at YAP were trained in the concept of adultism and the importance of behaving differently. See Bell, 1985 for more information)

Irene explained how the YAP staff created a “very supportive” environment and that the “staff was really handpicked for that.” Irene and Chantay both acknowledged how staff also “weren’t there to try to control you” (Irene’s words). For Chantay, this created a “contradiction to everything that I knew and understood about the relationship between adults and young people, and between people of color and the world of formal structures.” Chantay described experiencing a “foreign” environment in which “I could go and speak to adults and say, ‘You owe accountability to me for the role you play in my community, even though I can't vote,’ was huge.”

Meeting Concrete Developmental Need to Feel Safe

Participants also spoke about how YAP staff would, for example, help them when they needed to find housing or they needed extra academic support to stay in high school. Indeed, staff were able to meet participants’ developmental needs including and beyond their civic development. The word “safety” came up in several interviews as participants described exactly how they felt within this supportive and caring environment.

As a young adult staff member for the organization, David recalled how he worked to create a “zone of safety and a zone of high moral value within our group.” He explained that this “zone of safety” contrasted with the many environmental stressors around them including gangs, weapons, and “a lot of semi-legal, illegal, dangerous behavior around us and sometimes among us.” He described these efforts as “pulling against the ocean” as he saw “one group was trying so hard to make a change in their lives and their community and the one parallel group across the street had damn crack on their mind.” This context of the late 1970’s and early 1980’s is important for understanding the sheer power that YAP had to indeed pull against the ocean and support young people’s civic development and wellbeing.

Participants like Chantay and Santos spoke directly to this “zone of safety” in their interviews. As an adolescent, Santos was one young person colliding with this world of drugs described by David. He recalled, “At that time I was really young. I was hanging on the streets. I was, you know, using marijuana, you know, just mixing it up with the wrong type of crowd.” He said that as he became involved in YAP, he felt “safe.” When asked what exactly made him feel safe, Santos responded:

Because Dorothy [the director] has a way of making everybody feel important. And when you, when you, when you feel like people value your opinion, and who you are as an individual, you become comfortable, and you feel like you. You know, you feel respected, and you belong. You feel protected, and you also feel like you need to be protective... that's why I felt safe.

Chantay recalled how, through YAP and the caring relationships she established, she was able to redirect her life away from alcohol:

I had some real issues with alcohol back then or the beginnings of some real issues... And I think the people around me who saw that I was struggling, said, "Hey, we got this going on over here. We think you should be part of that." And, "We have this going on over here, we think you should be part of that." And ultimately, I think I felt cared about... And ultimately, I got sober... Because what I got from YAP, if I didn't get anything else, was hope. I got hope. And if a young Black girl could go and sit in the senator's office and make demands and have some of those demands be met, I could not be an alcoholic. I just couldn't.

Meanwhile, participants like Rey and M. Gladman were able to receive attention and care that they were not receiving at home. Rey explained that before he started attending YAP, he was “heading down the road where I was going to drop out of school, probably do stupid things.” For M. Gladman, YAP helped him counter a life where he “had every reason to be someone who's locked up now, or someone who's dead now.” This extra attention and support helped both of these participants steer clear of these paths, as Rey explained:

The Youth Action Program helped me in pursuing my dreams, not so much directly in becoming a police officer, but just the leadership skills that they taught me, the attention that they gave me that I wasn't getting at home. My grandmother wasn't neglecting me, but she was a single parent to three kids, because two of us died, and she was up there in age. My mom and my dad gave us up at a very young age. I had a very rough upbringing. I ended up living with my stepfather who ended up abusing me when I was a kid. Youth Action Program, even though I didn't disclose or mention anything of my abuse to anyone at the program, just by being involved with that program, and feeling, having that sense of someone caring for me, listening to me, guiding me, counseling me, mentoring me, made a big difference, made a big difference in my life.

Access to new experiences and contexts served as an additional way in which adults supported young people's ability to establish healthy lives. A subset of participants spoke enthusiastically about how their opportunities to venture into the outdoors, through YAP sponsoring their participation in programs like Outward Bound, or organizing all sorts of trips outside New York City, built a sense of confidence and curiosity that further fed their civic development. For instance, Mary Kay spoke about how through YAP she was encouraged to leave East Harlem and "go out into the center of the wilderness" where she said they had to "make our way in the woods." She reflected how this experience was "so symbolic to me of what we were doing in the ghetto anyway. There's no roads here. There's no real roads for us. We got to make our own roads." In this way, YAP helped youth participants to fulfill their developmental need for new experiences, further contributing to a stronger sense of self.

Cumulatively, participants in YAP were able to achieve so much in their civic development in large part because their more basic needs for safety and care were met by YAP staff and structures. Many YAP participants faced significant challenges in their home environments. YAP's ability to help these people direct their lives on positive paths, civically and beyond, speaks to the power of offering young people spaces where they can bring their whole selves--from their socioemotional needs to their economic challenges to their civic aspirations.

Opportunities to Question Led to Stronger Critical Reflection and Commitment to Social Change

Youth in YAP developed a critical lens on both their local and global communities. They also developed a stronger critical lens on the U.S. political system. Through becoming conscious across local, global, and political dimensions, they felt compelled to engage in civic change. They were furthermore able to reflect on the alternative ways of thinking; and being encouraged by YAP helped form alternative pathways that engendered long-term civic commitments.

Youth Discussions to Foster Critical Reflection

Through group discussions and youth-centered programming, participants in YAP were able to question the world around them. As they questioned, they became more critical of structural

inequities (i.e., developed their critical reflection) and more committed to transforming inequities and supporting their communities. Multiple dimensions of critical reflection were identified in participants' reflections:

1. **Political consciousness:** understanding how power and decision-making occurs via electoral politics and government.
2. **Local consciousness:** understanding the social, political, and economic landscape of their local communities.
3. **Global consciousness:** understanding the social, political, and economic landscape of the global community.

These forms of consciousness often sparked one another. For example, a development in local consciousness could lead to development in political consciousness. Summatively, these forms of critical reflection undergirded participants' burgeoning sense of civic duty (i.e., commitment to social change) as adolescents and stayed with them into adulthood.

For Johnny, questioning the world around him led him to think and become "conscious about how things happen and work." Of his neighborhood he questioned: "Why the divestment? Why the investment?" Here, we see Johnny developing his local and political consciousness. Kelly remembered a similar line of questioning as she contextualized her developing critical reflection:

I think it's pretty amazing that that happened, and it was in those discussion groups, it was in the camaraderie, it was in the sharing of understanding information from the days of what do you do at that event and building, going from there to, "Okay, but why is that building abandoned? How come it's in this state? What the hell is redlining? What are we doing with developers? Why can't we get a developer to do something good for us? How can we have those kinds of exchanges? How do we engage political people? Why are they important anyway?" That sort of stuff.

In her reflection, Kelly was therefore able to think both about what was transpiring locally and how we could work with others to catalyze change. At the same time, Santos shared a story of how he began to think more critically about his own community through learning about a global event: the trading of blood diamonds. He described:

So, we were in a circle discussing current events. And Dorothy started talking about a blood diamond... They were using young kids to go in, into the mines and dig out diamonds. And I had never heard of that. And I was like, how? How is that possible? And she explained to us that because no one's looking out for those young people, and no one is intervening, people are allowed to do that...I just realized 'Oh, no, you know, like we can't let that happen.' And there was a lot going on in the seventies, and we had the Young Lords you know who were fighting in East Harlem. There were a lot of

programs, pop up programs happening, but I felt like I was part of a, part of the best program in the community.

In his reflection, Santos moved quickly between describing his growing global consciousness and linking it to his local participation, suggesting that thinking about international problems can lead young people to act locally.

Chantay helped to further illuminate how these shifts in consciousness occurred. She said, "Initially, I had no ownership of my community. It belonged to whoever it belonged to." As she learned to question the parameters of her community and situate herself as part of this community, she recounted: "looking at the history of groups [in her neighborhood] and how the groups connect... that was a huge shift." As she located herself within the community, she also realized:

Elected politicians work for the people... And it's people that I know and other grownup people who vote for these people to be in... Oh yeah, they got to do better. They have to do better or we can get rid of them. They have to go. And that was a huge shift, that through my relationship with adults and their relationship with voting that I did in fact have some power in my community.

Providing and Pursuing Alternative Pathways

In their questioning and shifting of consciousness, participants' growing sensitivity to inequity was guided not only by their adolescent participation in YAP, but their longer term career and civic trajectories. With age and distance from youth, many participants were able to articulate how different their lives would have been had they not participated in YAP. Indeed, considering alternative realities wherein they did not participate in YAP, though not an interview prompt, became a common spontaneous expression during interviews. In one instance, Kelly was able to connect her growing ability to question, which she again emphasized as occurring within YAP's group discussion spaces, and to see social inequities, with her later career and civic commitments, considering what would have happened if she hadn't participated:

I think had I not participated in the hundreds of discussion groups about issues, current events, things that were going on, if they weren't part of the work that we were doing, I would have probably gone to college and just got a regular nine to five job and not really thinking about the rest of the world.

Similar to how Kelly reflected on how she came to think about the world and build her career in the nonpro, Johnny shared about how his growing consciousness helped him to take political and community leadership during his lifetime. Johnny's reflection illuminates how he transformed from feeling unseen and like he "didn't exist" to feeling newly powerful and capable to engage with both international and local issues:

You're talking to a kid who came out of public housing, lived on welfare, nobody talked to him, he didn't exist, no discussion of the future. And at 18 years old, I'm reading the New York Times in my public high school reading about the Contras in Nicaragua and what's happening. And I'm wondering about that. And I have no connection to that. But there I am. And in school, I mean, when I went off to school to college at Hunter College, I saw some people thinking and talking but it was so superficial and I felt like I was so much more ingrained than them. I was thinking about electoral politics. Oh, I also ran for district leadership in the Democratic Party and I also got in as well. So I still think about running for public office. And I still think about being involved in trying to make a difference and that the problem is good people who steer away from all of that because of misinformation and because of lack of exposure early in life.

Johnny's final statement underscores a common acknowledgement among participants that early exposure via programs like YAP shapes lifelong civic journeys. At the time of the interview, Johnny had served on several local community boards, including an organization for the developmentally disabled population, an organization to serve newly arrived immigrants to his community, and a community housing organization.

Opportunities to Act Led to Greater Leadership and Careers in Public Service

This sample of former YAP members expressed a resounding commitment to civic life to this day. Participants had built careers in public service, including jobs managing public housing, leading consulting organizations, and serving in the New York Police Department. Several participants had even started their own nonprofits. Some participants had retired and were continuing to engage in activities like serving on community boards, leading nonprofit organizations, and volunteering in their churches. Collectively, the evidence underscores how participation in YAP reverberated across participants' entire lifespans. Participants attributed their long-term civic endeavors to YAP's ability to create tangible impacts of civic work and to the ability to internalize and manifest YAP's values.

The Importance of Tangible Impacts

In part, participants attributed their life-long civic commitment to the early opportunity to create an impact through their civic work. YAP also uniquely offered youth the opportunity to create tangible results with their civic action. In the final focus group, participants wanted to reiterate that through YAP, youth were able to see the impacts of their work, and this visible change served as an important motivator to keep engaging. Kelly spoke to this important facet of YAP:

I think one of the uniqueness of Youth Action has been the ability to, and I don't know if this is reflected as much in the report, but I know that the tangible thing that a young person leaves behind as a result of the work that they do, that to me was also a difference...It creates a memory for a young person that's forever there of an accomplishment. And I think that that little thing really, really makes a big difference

because I believe we all live based on our memories. We respond to things based on our memories... And on the community level, we provided more housing, advocated for more housing, and also I think produced a lot of activists because beyond Youth Action Program is where I'd like to see a discussion. What goes beyond that on an individual level, on a community level.

As Kelly continued to reflect, we also again hear about how participants embedded the lessons they learned at YAP into their careers and in the choices she made about her own development. Kelly summarized how her development in critical thinking led to healthy choices and ultimately culminated in life-long choices about her civic work:

I never spoke about politics until I came to Youth Action. I never even thought about it... And to be part of the coalition at the time really made me think a lot, made me read a lot, made me become interested in a lot of things and go to school, and be involved in things and also not be involved in things. It also helped me look at the world and say, "No, I don't want to be part of that. I'm not going to do that just for money." And that sort of thing. So I think there's so many points of success that need to be reflected in such a historical report for Youth Action. And I'm forever grateful.

In another instance, Irene shared about how, through her different consulting jobs, she repeated a lot of the lessons she learned in YAP. In the excerpt below, Irene specifically listed off the types of questions and aspects of civic action she considered as she led later community initiatives:

It was a lot of the same thing: all right, so what do you want to do? How are we going to help you do this? What are the objectives? What's the plan? We learned all of that at Youth Action... how are we going to do this? What are some questions you're going to ask him? What are you concerned about? Is it the environment? Is it the lack of afterschool programs? Is it the lack of parks or things to do for the kids? When we did the conferences... what are the things you want to talk about? Who should we have speak? So who do you think is a better speaker? Okay, let's get Kelly to talk. Okay, let's get this person. Oh, they're comfortable doing that. I would never do that. No, I'll do the artwork. I'm better in art. So really identifying, allowing the young people to identify their strengths and what they wanted to work on. So it was a safe place, a real good, safe place.

Irene's series of questions therefore highlights all of the aspects of changemaking she learned at YAP. And her concluding remarks, about how YAP allowed youth to center their strengths and interests, help to explain the sense of safety that youth felt. This sense of safety clearly encouraged and fortified their subsequent civic action.

Internalization and Manifestation of YAP Values and Practices

Participants further expanded on how their civic trajectories were shaped by their adolescent experiences in YAP. In their reflections, they explained how they were able to internalize the

values and practices of YAP and manifest them well beyond their adolescent contexts. For example, M. Gladman shared that he had “a successful career and finished off in upper middle management [in the New York Housing Authority] and retired seven years ago,” but that he is still “very much involved with public housing and serving the employees and the residents of public housing even today, but now it's through a private organization.” He then reflected that YAP “had a direct effect on what I learned early on about community organizing. It was one of the key factors that enabled me to have a successful career with the Housing Authority.”

Chantay listed off a long list of ways she had tried to help others based on what she learned at YAP:

I've worked with substance abusers. I've worked with people who have the HIV-AIDS virus. I've worked with people who are homeless. I've worked for the Department of Homeless Services. I've worked with women who have been incarcerated. I've worked with families of women who have been incarcerated or involved with the criminal justice system. So it's just been this ongoing thing of there are people out there that I can be helpful to, if only to say, "Hey, what's going on with you and how can I help?"

Kelly reflected on her career through youth development work:

My time at Youth Action just led to years of working in youth development. I worked for other organizations with similar philosophies, definitely with young people's voices always at the forefront, and engaging young people in decision making about their own lives and also what they could do for the community. It's been very, very powerful.

In fact, Kelly, like several other participants, had started her own non-profit, where she has “tried to bring a lot of things that I felt that I had in East Harlem here [in Staten Island] that's still missing.” In her organization, she worked to instill within young people the sense that “you can control your destiny,” a principle she learned at YAP. Rey similarly started an organization in upstate New York for young people, one focused on teens’ growing mental health challenges. Rey reported:

We're now in our fifth year, and on an average, we have about 100 teenagers that come to our program. It's a 501c3, a legit program... The teenagers love the program that we have. It reminds me so much, and I treat the young people now the way I was treated in the Youth Action Program. I think that's what continues to make us successful with this program. That's what we're doing.

Notably, the two adult members of YAP charged with supporting youth-driven work also continued on career-long paths of civic service, suggesting that YAP instilled in both youth and adults the power of community organizing. Ethel explained the transformative power of YAP to shape her own thinking about her ability to organize for low-income housing in her community:

I think the whole creation of Youth Action, and actually being able to get a building and have young people work on it, was powerful. And for me, that was thinking out of the box, because nobody else was doing any kind of stuff like that. And young people got to be involved, and they were helping to make decisions, and all of that stuff that folks really weren't doing back then. So for me, that was very impressive.

Indeed, Ethel went on to be involved in housing advocacy for decades as president of the Tenants' Association. As she said, "I think that what I've been doing for the past 40-something years, is that I've been organizing with public housing... and just trying to make people aware of what was going on and what rules and regulations [they should know]"

Summatively, participants repeatedly expressed how impactful their YAP experiences had been on their careers and service to their communities. We begin to see how YAP experiences reached the next generation via former YAP members' efforts to support the next generation of young people. Thus, we can conclude that YAP had a formative effect on both participants' lives and a larger reverberation across communities far beyond East Harlem.

DISCUSSION

The Youth Action Program (YAP) was able to support youths' civic development across multiple dimensions. Indeed, I found strong evidence of civic development using three different conceptualizations of youth civic development (i.e., positive youth development, sociopolitical development, and psychological empowerment theory). **Taken together, the results of this study are encouraging: a replication of YAP would likely succeed in fostering healthy and engaged citizens who are able to thrive in their communities and who remain committed to creating social change that benefits their communities.**

Evidence of Positive Youth Development

Many participants were able to build their ability to thrive in their community via development in their positive youth development (PYD), or rather, their caring, confidence, character, connection, competence and contribution. The most clear evidence of their PYD is in three different Cs: caring, confidence, and contribution (though evidence of all 6 C's is apparent; see the codebook in Table 1). In terms of caring, participants expressed a sense of empathy for young people and for those struggling within their communities. Likely, their ability to care for others was at least in part related to the sense that they were themselves being cared for, as many discussed how YAP staff were committed to supporting their wellbeing. Participants furthermore expressed how they grew in their confidence as they engaged in civic action and felt more seen and heard. This sense of care and confidence then rooted their contributions to community, which were many.

PYD has been posited as a pathway toward lifelong thriving, as the 6 C's undergird individuals' ability to establish a sense of personal wellbeing. While mental health was not explicitly discussed by participants, they did discuss at length about how YAP participation helped them establish healthier and more meaningful life trajectories. Likely, YAP participation thus also encouraged more positive mental health, and indeed participants did speak about the importance of hope, which is certainly an aspect of personal wellbeing. Contemporary iterations of YAP would likely similarly cultivate a stronger sense of wellbeing.

Evidence of Psychological Empowerment

Participants' burgeoning sense of hope and agency through YAP is also indicative of the psychological empowerment theory of civic development. In particular, we see strong development of the emotional component of psychological empowerment, wherein YAP participants were able to develop both hope about their abilities and action, and a related sense of control over their circumstances (that they have power and voice and can both create and require better for their communities). This sense of hope and agency were essential to lifelong civic endeavors, and should be underscored especially for this sample of participants who grew up as youth of color in low-income families and neighborhoods. Low-income youth of color are often deterred by systems and structures from building a sense of control and capability to effect change, and thus YAP's successful efforts to elevate these young people's civic power in the face of these circumstances is commendable and worthy of replication.

Evidence of Sociopolitical Development

Development in participants' PYD also entwined with their understanding of how systems of power influence people's lived experiences, or rather, their PYD entwined with their sociopolitical development. Participants discussed how they built their critical reflection and pursued actions to create solutions to problems in their communities. In this work they learned to engage elected officials to gain their support, or to hold them accountable. Importantly, participants' critical reflection was multidimensional and dynamic, such that they were able to learn across local, global, and political spheres of power. Their learning fed their commitment to social change, or rather, because they saw inequities in how their neighborhoods were treated and funded, they wanted to engage in electoral and political processes, as well as acts of service, to support the changes they envisioned. But seeing inequities is distinct from acting to change them. In this study, however, participants did indeed both see and act. This makes their sociopolitical development potent and transformative both for the youth and for the communities that benefited from their growth.

It is not often that research pulls from all three of these civic development theories, but the robust evidence of development across these three theories speaks to the ability of YAP to build active, engaged life-long community members and leaders. The consistency and positive passion in the reporting by these eleven participants is powerful and convincing. Interestingly, among them they represented most of the distinct projects sponsored on different blocks by

YAP, and they reported very similar experiences due to the consistent philosophy and approach across projects.

Notably, this report has focused on the impact on the participants. However, there is another impact resulting from the tangible community improvement projects that the participants designed and implemented. They produced 124 units of affordable housing that are still being sustained in East Harlem, a community-owned park that still exists, a Leadership School that lasted several years as part of the public school system, student governments in several high schools, direct service through Hotline Cares for years to many East Harlem teenagers in need of personal support, permanent housing for a group of young mothers, and a lasting crime prevention youth patrol in Johnson Housing Projects. This report did not try to evaluate the impact of their actual projects, just the impact on the participant leaders' own lifelong trajectories. Any community engagement effort similar to Youth Action would have both lasting impacts on the participants and enormous tangible benefits for the community. These are unpredictable, because the young people would determine what they would create. They would be meaningful service to the community.

The Essential and Replicable Elements of YAP

Accordingly, the report highlights how the program was able to offer opportunities to build voice, to access supportive adults, to question, and to act over time. What perhaps ties these opportunities together are three important programmatic tenets that should be replicated in future iterations of YAP. Each tenet below is based in participants' reflections of what made YAP "stick" for participants across their lifespan:

1. **Careful vetting and training of adults who can support a youth-centered program and build meaningful individual relationships that foster safety and care.** Adults need to be skilled at practices that encourage youth to develop their own critical thinking skills and that allow youth to exercise their authentic voices and visions for social change.
2. **Offering tangible opportunities for youth to enact community change that they can see and draw upon as motivation for more learning and action.** Youth need to be able to see that they can catalyze actual results in their communities. Adults play a role at the nexus of encouraging youth to take youth-led action and helping youth navigate complex social and political structures. In other words, youth need to be empowered to do the hands-on work of change-making but also need to be supported in understanding and reflecting on what change can look like.
3. **Creating programmatic structures where youth have actual power in the organization (e.g., ability to hire/fire staff).** Youth should be integral to all elements of a youth-centered program. This means that they are involved in who runs the program and what the program does and how the program does it. These internal opportunities

to lead can form the foundation for the skills and efficacy needed to catalyze community-based change.

Application Today

The world today is in many ways different from that of East Harlem in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Across the globe, the introduction of social media, escalation of climate change, and increase in political polarization are just some of the new challenges for communities, and for adolescents especially. Yet, as the old saying goes: "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Young people today, like young people 45 years ago, fight to have their voices and opinions heard.

Across time and contexts, adolescents must develop their sense of agency and their ability to critically reflect on the local, political, and global contexts as they consider how to have their perspectives included. They must also adopt skills through leadership opportunities and interact with elected officials. Indeed, adolescent development remains rooted in the same civic processes. It's just the target of change-making that may have evolved. As such, the core tenets of YAP endure the test of time. We still need programs that prepare adults to center young people's power and abilities. We still need places that cultivate a sense of safety and agency amidst a challenging sociopolitical world. We still need to offer young people tangible opportunities to change their environments for the better. Indeed, the beauty of YAP is that it is youth-driven in what issues are addressed. It's on adults to ask young people: what needs to change, and how should we change it? As such, the work becomes less about engendering any one political agenda, but more about how youth want to take the lead across an endless list of social issues. Then it's also on the adults to make sure the young people can succeed, by helping them access the necessary resources, and by sticking with it when things get rough.

CONCLUSION

The Youth Action Program met critical developmental needs for young people in East Harlem in the late 1970's and early 1980's. While the world has certainly evolved since then, young people today still contend with systemic forces that marginalize them and with deeply internalized hopelessness and powerlessness flowing from the cumulative impacts of poverty and racism in our society. The essential ingredients of YAP: being respected, cared about, and taken seriously; being given the opportunities to question, to create, to act, and to be seen and heard, still ring true in today's sociopolitical climate and with contemporary youths' developmental needs to find belonging, purpose, and skills to establish their wellbeing into adulthood. This report presents a compelling case for how a well designed and well implemented youth development program, like Youth Action Program, can have cascading effects on individuals' lives and can help establish not only healthier lives, but stronger communities filled with people who are committed and active in creating solutions to economic, social, and/or political problems.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the former YAP members for their time and involvement in this study: Christopher Bell, David Calvert, Kenny Cox, Rey Hernandez, Chantay Jones, Jenny Macias, Santos Martinez, MaryKay Penn, Johnny Rivera, Irene Rivera and Ethel Velez. We thank Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg for her feedback.

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Appendix A. East Harlem Agenda for the Eighties

"There's nothing you can't have if you want it, so don't ever let anybody tell you that you can't do this because you're Red, Black, Hispanic or whatever. You can do whatever you feel you want to do if you work hard to achieve it."

Tony Minor
Steering Committee Member

The YOUTH AGENDA for the Eighties (produced and distributed by the East Harlem Youth Congress in 1982)

This YOUTH AGENDA is made up of recommendations from the workshops and dialogues at the 1982 East Harlem Youth Leadership Conference, along with some recommendations from the 1980 Youth Conference.

There were a total of over 500 people putting in their ideas at these two conferences: about 400 young people and 100 adults. The adults were representatives from the business community, the Board of Education, the Police Department, the military, youth programs, other community programs, elected officials, landlords, parents, and other interested adults.

We do not see this AGENDA as a final thing. There were some issues not covered, and there are other people in East Harlem who might want to have input. So, we'd like to keep adding to this until it is really a full YOUTH AGENDA that East Harlem can unite behind.

However, we think it is a strong basic statement already, expressing the views of 500 people, so we hope you will read it carefully, let us know what is missing, and help implement the parts you agree with.

Following are the recommendations, by category. In some cases, the workshop recorders gave us summaries of the discussion; these have been included because they are interesting.

EMPLOYMENT

Forty people attended a dialogue between young people and employers and businessmen. The discussion turned mainly to how businesspeople could help youth, so the recommendations under employment are taken from 1980:

- 1 We want useful jobs which will build up our community: for example, renovating buildings, planting gardens, tutoring.
- 2 Full youth employment should be a national goal.
- 3 There should be less government spending on the military, and more attention to employment.

BUSINESS AND THE COMMUNITY

There was great interest expressed by the young people in learning how to become businesspeople. The recommendations reflect this interest:

- 1 Successful adults should support young people. For example, each employer or businessperson could take one or two young workers "under their wing" in an apprentice-like relationship. Employers should make a special effort to help young people learn, get experience, make contacts, and move into better employment opportunities. We should form our own networks to help each other along.

- 2 Young people should focus first on getting an education and on getting work experience that will develop our knowledge and skills; getting into business can come later if we really want to.
- 3 We should explore bringing Junior Achievement into East Harlem, as a way for young people to learn more about the business world.
- 4 Young people should do careful self-evaluations and set goals; then we should work very hard to reach the goals.
- 5 The community should support local businesses and encourage them to stay in East Harlem. Businesses should work together.

ECONOMICS:

A workshop on Reaganomics was held. The speaker, economist Bill Tabb, laid out the basic ideas of Keynesian economics and of supply-side economics.

- Keynesian (pronounced Cainsian) economics was a response to economic depression. Its solution was for the government to spend money employing people to rebuild the failing economy. It worked in the 1930s to end the Great Depression

However, now we have a recession and an inflation at the same time. This has never happened before. Just spending government money might relieve the recession, but it usually makes inflation worse. As a result, the economists haven't known what to do.

Supply-side economists (who are the ones Reagan is following) say that business should be freed from regulation and taxation, and then they will re-invest their money and energy into the economy, making it strong again and providing lots of new jobs. They say government spending should be cut, and businesses should be supported.

But so far businesses are not re-investing: they are investing in other countries where profits can be higher due to lower costs; and they are buying up other companies. Also, the government is still spending just as much money, only now it is on the military instead of on people's programs, so government spending is even more inflationary than people-spending, because the military doesn't create anything for people to buy.

So, neither the problems of recession nor the problems of inflation are being solved, and meanwhile more people are out of work. Our recommendations:

- 1 All solutions should focus on employment as a priority.
- 2 Military spending should be slowed down. Instead emphasize the government's role in seeing to it that its citizens have:
 - A Employment
 - B Housing
 - C Food
 - D Education
 - E Health Care
 - F Mass Transit
- 3 The government should create support for small businesses.
- 4 The government should create a safe environment for workers: health benefits and protection from job hazards.

- 5 Corporations should be taxed their fair share. Current efforts to relieve corporations of taxes are not helping.
- 6 There should be a national housing entitlement program.
- 7 We should encourage all forms of self-reliance among our people, not dependence on the government.
- 8 We should express our views through VOTING. And we should vote with our feet by attending demonstrations, conferences, and rallies.

EDUCATION:

About forty people participated in a dialogue between teachers, School Board representatives, and students. The results of this dialogue were combined with the results of a 1980 position paper based on the ideas of 150 young people, to get the following summary recommendations:

- 1 General
 - A Make the curriculum relevant to the lives of students by including materials on ethnic heritage, jobs, and the issues of today.
 - B Establish programs with greater flexibility so that students can make choices that reflect their interests.
 - C Establish smaller schools, smaller classrooms, and a sense of community within each classroom.
 - D Make certain that the school relates to the community as a whole; provide access for community people and a forum for ideas and problems.
 - E Provide educational programs that help young people to respect themselves and others.
 - F Young people must get involved in influencing educational programs by going to School Board meetings, dealing with principals and other administrators, and participating in policy decisions.
- 2 Relations between teachers and students
 - A Establish clear expectations of behavior and work, possibly by using written contracts.
 - B Teachers and students must recognize that both are human beings with needs and problems and must try to treat each other with understanding.
 - C Teachers should establish contact with parents.
 - D Teachers should keep their personal problems out of the classroom.
 - E Learning is the responsibility of both teacher and student.
 - F Teachers and students should have opportunities to establish schools and other educational settings that fit their real interests.
 - G Administration should provide training and support to teachers.

"It's sad that we as Spanish and Black children put ourselves down. But it's not our fault. It's a reflection of how society operates. It can be changed. We are already involved in changing it, because we understand it, and we care. That's why I want to join with everybody to build a community based on love!... Love is a strong force, the force that shall

dominate the world if it is liberated.- Johnny Rivera, Keynote Speaker

- 1 In order for students to participate more fully in school policy they must:
 - A Establish effective communication with principals early, before problems arise.
 - B Make alliances with adults who influence the principal.
 - C Prepare carefully for meetings with administrators so that we can get our point across.
 - D Upgrade student organizations: make them work.
- 2 Concerns specific to East Harlem schools:
 - A Make sure that all students get what they need. Don't focus just on the most successful.
 - B Question: What will happen to the students currently in Benjamin Franklin High School when it is closed? What schools will they go to?

HOUSING:

Following are the recommendations from the dialogue between landlords and tenants:

- 1 We need government and private sector subsidies for housing in low-income communities.
- 2 We are against the replacement of the existing government subsidy programs with so-called housing vouchers.
- 3 We are opposed to the cutbacks and phasing out of the public housing programs across the nation.
- 4 We support the overall and eventual goal of tenant ownership.
- 5 There is a need for more information in the community about the advantages of cooperative ownership of buildings.
- 6 There should be technical assistance for tenants wanting to buy or manage their own buildings.
- 7 Tenants should be encouraged to organize against gentrification and displacement.
- 8 The community should develop plans for renovating abandoned buildings and squatting in partially occupied buildings so as to use all the housing resources available.
- 9 There is a need to improve landlord—tenant relationships. There should be communication regarding the costs of running a building, what rent actually pays for, discussions of economic realities and tenants' rights. Landlords should be accessible for meetings, and should fulfill their responsibilities, such as cleaning sidewalks and back yards.
- 10 The issue of the homeless must be faced by public planners: according to news reports there are 36,000 homeless people in New York City.
- 11 The names of housing support groups should be widely publicized: East Harlem Triangle, East Harlem Council for Human Services, East 116th Street Block Association, Hope Community, Community Planning Board #11, Metro North, NERVE, Intercultural Resource Development, Renegades Housing Movement, Youth Action Restoration Crew, and others.

CRIME PREVENTION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Summary of the discussion between young people and police:

- The young people felt that police behavior and attitudes toward young people in the community

was disrespectful, uncaring, and at times abusive. The young people felt powerless to deal with these abuses.

- The police representatives said the police perceive the problem as one of extensive crime and lack of community support in helping the police do their jobs.
- Both sides felt there was a lack of communication between police and youth concerning what are the community problems, how police deal with them, how the community could help, and how the police could change.

Recommendations:

- 1 The City should strengthen community relations services in the police department.
- 2 The Police Department should give better training to its officers in community relations, especially relations with young people.
- 3 Groups in the community should hold meetings to let the police department know what the community needs and wants from police services; community and youth representatives should attend the Police Community Council meetings and give input.
- 4 The problems of crime cannot be solved alone. We must work together to solve all the problems of our community. All must be solved for any one of them to be truly solved. We need to keep organizing in a positive direction to oppose crime and the causes of crime, to get:
 - jobs, better schools, parks, and recreational programs.
 - more conferences like this one to continue steering young people in the right direction.
 - more political power.
 - more economic power through local businesses.
- 5 We need to develop a campaign against drugs.
 - A dry up the market for drugs through educating people against drug use. Strengthen peer groups to oppose drugs; strengthen ourselves to resist drugs.
 - B apply political pressure on law enforcement agencies to prevent the flow of drugs into our communities.
- 6 Prevent police abuses and hold police accountable for respecting the community.
 - A Police who do wrong should be required to suffer the consequences.
 - B People should help their friends or acquaintances who are arrested unjustly, or are the victims of police brutality, by testifying on their behalf. People need to follow through by going directly to the precinct when they see something wrong happen.
- 7 Form Youth Patrols to cut crime.

YOUTH AND THE MILITARY:

A far-reaching and intense dialogue between young people and representatives of the military led to the following recommendations:

- 1 In school and other settings young people need to be informed about various options that are available to them, not just the military.
- 2 Whenever the value of the military, especially in public schools, is presented, the opposite side should be presented as well.

- 3 Draft counseling should be used to present a total view of what military is and what it means.
- 4 Selective Service laws should be examined, and people should be educated about them.

Great disagreements existed among the group about the role of the military and about foreign policy and domestic spending policies. It was agreed that individuals have the right to their own views, and to live their lives according to their views, no matter how difficult it may be for others to accept their views; but dialogue should not stop, because the process of reaching informed consensus about the role of the military is essential to the human race.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY:

Young women face special problems as we grow up in this community and this society. Some of these problems are as follows:

Education: Young women are not being encouraged to go into male dominated fields like law, science, and medicine. We are influenced by stereotyped male and female roles. Furthermore, the reality of family responsibilities, such as having children and caring for our parents, makes it difficult to go on with our education.

Sexism: There is widespread sexism (meaning the attitude that men are better than women and that women are meant to be sex objects or assistants for men) in the family, in the educational system, in the media. It affects everything.

Abuse of Women: The extreme form of sexism is rape and other physical abuse of women. There is a lack of preventative measures, and a lack of services, shelters, and counseling.

Family and Job/Career Problems: The men are not sharing enough with household work and child-rearing. Women are put in low-paying jobs and are paid less than men for jobs doing equal work. There are not enough family planning services and childcare services.

Recommendations:

- 1 We need more leadership training for young women.
- 2 We need more day care and support systems for young mothers.
- 3 There should be widespread human sexuality education.
- 4 We should have consciousness raising about sexism in the media, especially advertising.
- 5 We need a way to deal with rape, both preventing it and helping women who have been raped.
- 6 We should develop communication between young women and older women.
- 7 Approach working women in the community for assistance in career education.
- 8 Self-defense training for women should be a priority.
- 9 There is a need for dialogues between young women and young men about relationships, sex, and child-rearing, in mixed groups.

SEX, PREGNANCY, AND RELATIONSHIPS:

A good part of this workshop was direct sex education. It was very well attended. Recommendations were as follows:

- 1 More sex education: dialogues between young men and women, discussion of attitudes towards

sexuality everywhere — at school, at home, and in programs; more workshops, more communication between men and men, women and women, between partners, and in the family.

- 2 More outreach to inform people of clinics, sex education, and birth control.
- 3 Some kind of attention to helping people develop and sustain relationships based on mutual respect, serious relationships in which people are honest and not exploiting each other.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS:

About 20 people, including 2 elected officials and many active youth, had a general discussion about youth involvement in the electoral process and the accountability of politicians. Their recommendations were as follows:

- 1 We should do a massive Voter Education Campaign.
- 2 We should develop a structure for accountability of our public officials. The structure should include finding out exactly what our politicians are doing and how they are voting; and should include criteria for what we think is good political leadership.
- 3 A group of young people should meet with the politicians on a regular basis reporting back to the youth community on what the politicians are doing.

We young people need to be informed about specific issues and be clear about what we want.

The politicians should be accessible for meetings and should provide full reports on what they vote for and against. It should not be necessary to do complicated research to find out how our representatives are representing us.

- 4 There should be forums on politics for youth, including training in the actual electoral process and political history.
- 5 There should be internships for interested youth to work alongside elected officials (Councilman Robert Rodriguez and State Senator Olga Mendez offered to take initiative in raising funds for this.).

LEADERSHIP:

Some qualities of good leadership are these: honesty, correctness of purpose, sincerity, being motivated, taking initiative, knowing oneself, listening to what other people want, sorting out emotional reactions from objective thinking, getting consensus from the group and delivering results to the whole group.

Some DO's and DONT's: Do be supportive and loving; DO care about yourself, see that you have a good support system, have a knowledge of what needs to be done and how, take criticism as feedback, treat all equally, consult with peers, be openminded, share information, take a stand, be organized, be visible; DON'T take on too many responsibilities, and don't engage in arm-twisting or threatening or bribing.

Recommendations:

- 1 We need more development and encouragement of women as leaders.
- 2 More training in organizing skills.
- 3 More ways of continuing to deepen our commitment to the community.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS:

We believe that all programs and institutions dealing with youth would be improved by involving the young people in decision-making and implementation. The programs would be more effective, more responsive to the real needs of the young people. Further, they would be helping the community through training our next generation of adult leadership, making the most of our human resources.

The main obstacles to increasing youth involvement are:

- 1 People with more experience tend to crowd out those with less experience by talking more. This includes both adults and experienced young people.
- 2 The process of involving young people in decision-making takes time, and adults are often rushed, or programs are understaffed.

Nonetheless, we propose that:

- 1 People with more experience learn to be sensitive to those with less experience in order to get their input.
- 2 Administrators should allow the time to make decisions involving everybody's input. The benefits more than outweigh the difficulty.

Appreciations

We would like to thank the following people who did a wonderful job as resource people, moderators, cooks, recorders, and conveners at the Conference, because they showed that they really care about the young people in East Harlem. We're sorry we can't thank all the people who made wonderful speeches, because we don't have all the names. And really, we'd like to thank everyone who came!

Mark Alexander
 Regina Ross
 Freddy Acosta
 Mary Kay Penn
 Edgar Acevedo
 Senator Olga
 Mendez Ruben Acosta
 Councilman Robert Rodriguez
 Kenneth Askew
 Irene Rivera
 Emilio Bernard
 Sargeant Nunez
 Francisco Diaz
 Jose Rivera Tito Delgado
 Naomi Rice
 Shelley Inniss
 Terry Scher
 David Calvert
 Hirazn Maristany
 Linda Duke
 Bill Tabb
 Ena Fox
 Victor Ortiz
 Kathy Huber

Roberta Stallings
Peter Kleinbard
Gladys Padro
Chantay Jones
Daniel Rivera
Linda Gonzalez
Tony Minor
Linda Federici
Patrick Shields
Gloria Lattimore
Mario Morales
Cynthia Or chart
Steven Shapiro
Ismael Nunez

Appendix B. Code Book

METATHEME	THEME	DEFINITION	CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE QUOTE
<i>Personal development: Ways in which participants saw themselves grow and develop through their time at YAP</i>					
	Positive Youth Development	Developing one's personal qualities in a way that supports greater community participation	Connection	Developing a commitment to one's community and sense that one can understand the community and be involved	"That's the stuff that I've been doing is just developing resources for a community that's in big need. We are a community development through community involvement organization doing things that help not only the people's environment but the built environment of our urban community fare better when it comes to environmental, social, and criminal justice." - Kelly
			Empathy and caring	Developing a sense of care for others; wanting to help others	"And [through] Hotline Cares, where we spoke to young people. You know, we spoke to young people who were queer and/ or suffering from depression, and you know, we had to learn how to be compassionate and understanding. You know, Hotline Cares and Youth Action Program really helped me to understand people, and in turn, you know, I developed you know ...who I was." - Santos
			Character	Developing one's moral qualities	"There were peers that were not up to par at the moment. But the group was very supportive of each other. It's like being supportive of one another was really important and your credentials were not academic. They were the way you carry yourself, your character. And so, I liked that as well." -Johnny
			Confidence	Developing one's sense of assurance in one's abilities and worth	"I was a very shy young kid when I was a teenager and being involved in Youth Action Program, I kind of got out of my shell. It built up my confidence. Very, very, very important. Youth Action Program, Dorothy and her whole staff just grained into us, built up our confidence, built up our self-esteem, just gave us the tools that we didn't have as being inner city kids, being raised up in an impoverished area... gave us the tools for us to succeed in life." - Rey
	Elements of Agency	Developing aspects of one's sense of capability to make social change	Voice	Developing one's perspective and ability to articulate that perspective, especially related to pursuits of social change	"So there were moments that cultivated the idea that this quiet guy has something to say because no one else would have wanted to listen to me. Nobody even asked me for my thoughts and I didn't exist anywhere. So I thought." - Johnny

			Power	Developing one's sense of ability to enact social change	"That young people are powerful, and I was going to say young people are powerful and dangerous but that's Audre Lorde that says women are powerful and dangerous. No. Young people are powerful and that, to me, says it all, that we have power, and through Youth Action, and groups like Youth Action, we can activate that power and change the world. Just change the world." - Kelly
			Leadership	Developing one's sense that they can take charge and direct social change	"For example, we got to interview folks to come and work at the organization. So, these are young people interviewing adults. So, we learn how you interview and then how we process what we think we've heard and what we think at the end. And, again, democratically kind of come to a conclusion about who we decide to support for the position." -Johnny
Critical reflection	Developing one's understanding of social structures and societal inequities, both locally and globally	Local consciousness		Awareness and engagement with local systems of power and inequities	"I think it's pretty amazing that that happened, and it was in those discussion groups, it was in the camaraderie, it was in the sharing of understanding information from the days of what do you do at that event and building, going from there to, "Okay, but why is that building abandoned? How come it's in this state? What the hell is redlining? What are we doing with developers? Why can't we get a developer to do something good for us? How can we have those kind of exchanges? How do we engage the political people? Why are they important anyway?" That sort of stuff..... that really helped me understand that and bring it into consciousness and that's what I mean is that the average 14 year old was not engaged in a conversation about what was going on with federal funding or state funding or why that affected us at all and how that ... They were able to help us understand the direct connection between decisions that were being made in Washington or Albany and how that affected us in little old Harlem, and how we could affect change." - Kelly

			Global consciousness	Awareness and engagement with global systems of power and inequities	"So, we were in a circle discussing current events. And Dorothy started talking about a blood diamond. And you know, it was about the African and Africa ...I mean the diamond mines that they were using young kids to go in, into the mines and dig out diamonds. And I had never heard of that. And I was like, you know, how? How is that possible? And you know, she explained to us that because no one's looking out for those young people., and no one is intervening. People are allowed to do that. And and it's just not right. And at that point I realized like, I don't want to see anybody going to the diamond mines, and these are little kids who are, you know, filling their lungs with toxic air doing, you know cavings, And it it just I just realized like, Oh, no, you know, like we can't let that happen." - Santos
			Political consciousness	Awareness and engagement with political systems (local, state, and national) of power and inequities	"I got really interested in more about the movement that they were building. I think through the course of working with Youth Action, my political consciousness was raised, my understanding of ... It really opened my eyes to how the world works and how I could affect change, even as a young person, that I could actually have an impact." - Kelly
	Shaping futures	Identifying ways in which participation in Youth Action Program informed one's life course	Purpose	Developing one's sense of civic purpose, and how that purpose propelled civic engagement throughout the lifespan	"I then said, 'Yeah, this is about gender, this is about race, this is about power dynamics.' And all of that had been there at Youth Action Program, too, because we were fighting to have a say in the community and to make the community better. That really triggered me to move toward wanting to see a larger social change. I entered into that with my education in anthropology". - MaryKay
			Life-long trajectory	Identifying ways in which YAP left a lasting impact on one's life, including one's career and sense of community	"It gave me that picture. Had I not had that picture, I would not be doing what I'm doing today. Had I not had that picture of young people having a voice and speaking out and, as a result of speaking out, having some success, I would not have built the organization that we're building right now, or any of the other groups that I've worked with in the past. I've always tried to make, even in organizations that didn't have young people in the forefront, place young people in the forefront of my work." - Kelly

			Alternative realities	Considering what one's life would have looked like if they had not joined YAP	"Yeah. You see, before I started attending Youth Action Program, not at the time, but looking back, I was ... How can I explain? I was kind of heading in the wrong direction. I was heading down the road where I was going to drop out of school, probably do stupid things that I should not be doing, which will probably have led to me being arrested, becoming part of the criminal justice system, possibly indulging in drugs, in drug use. Which in my family, just not my two brothers, but my oldest sister also had a substance abuse issue. But yeah, Youth Action Program, if it wasn't for Youth Action Program and Dorothy Stoneman in giving me that attention that I needed, giving me that loving care that a child's supposed to get from his mom and his dad, if it wasn't for Youth Action Program, I think I would've continued down the wrong road and God knows where that would've led me. But definitely I credit Youth Action Program, and Dorothy, and Dave Calvert, who still, to this day, is still involved with Youth Action Program." - Rey
			Choosing differently	Discussing choices away from drugs, alcohol, gangs, etc. because of joining YAP	"And ultimately, I think I felt cared about. And I had to make choices about how involved I was going to be with my alcohol, how involved I was going to be with my friends, how involved I was going to be with YAP, how effective I could be as a leader beyond a certain point, if I didn't do something with the alcohol use. And ultimately, I got sober. And I got sober fairly young. Because what I got from YAP, if I didn't get anything else, was hope. I got hope. And if a young Black girl could go and sit in the senator's office and make demands and have some of those demands be met, I could not be an alcoholic. I just couldn't. And so ultimately, I had to choose between the people that I loved, that stood for what I stood for, and alcohol, and I chose my people. I chose my people". - Chantay

Program elements: Salient aspects of YAP that informed personal development and wellbeing

	Fostering civic development	Program mechanisms that supported youths' civic development	Discussion groups	Describing spaces to talk about different social issues or how to make social change; includes questioning what is going on and what to do about it	"Many people in oppressed states don't even know that they're oppressed and I forgot who said that and I think that Youth Action just helped us bust that bubble for me. I think had I not participated in the hundreds of discussion groups about issues, current events, things that were going on, if they weren't part of the work that we were doing, I would have probably gone to college and just got a
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					regular nine to five job and not really thinking about the rest of the world." - Kelly
			Opportunities for civic action	Describing moments where one took political or social action to address systemic issues and inequities	"And so the Youth Congress was sort of, even though there was a group of them, it was the uniting structure in a lot of ways, because that was where we decided a lot of our agenda for the overall movement or the overall program, and how we were going to be involved on a community level, and how we were going to be involved with the political structure, and how we would do those things. And that had interactions with our elected officials. And so everybody sort of coalesced through and in and out of that body." - Chantay
			Opportunities to learn and think	Describing opportunities to gain new knowledge and/or skills	"She wanted to build something where not only can we help but that we could learn." Santos
			Addressing root causes	Describing how young people learned to think about the causes of social issues and how to address problems at the cause	"We learned all of that at Youth Action, all those things we will walk through, [inaudible 00:22:08] want to do, how are we going to do this? What are some questions you're going to ask him? What are you concerned about? Is it the environment? Is it the lack of afterschool programs? Is it the lack of parks or things to do for the kids? When we did the conferences, what are the things you want to talk about? Who should we have speak? So who do you think is a better speaker? Okay, let's get Kelly to talk. Okay, let's get this person. Oh, they're comfortable doing that. I would never do that. No, I'll do the artwork. I'm better in art. So really identifying, allowing the young people to identify their strengths and what they wanted to work on. So it was a safe place, a real good, safe place." - Irene
			Building community	Describing how YAP built a shared, communal space and fostered a sense of connection, belonging and support among members	"We all ended up having an atmosphere that allowed us to be friends, that allowed fighting to be kept at a minimum, because young people fight, go back and forth. Very little of that do I remember. Of course, you're going to have internal people that you talk about and stuff like that, but I don't remember the huge breaks or fights. Trying to be nurturing about stuff. They did a lot of things right in terms of focusing on the atmosphere, focusing on the process. You see how Dorothy is still, at 80, very process oriented.

					You see how she facilitates our call and she probably facilitates your conversation. You try to talk to her, she's facilitating you, trying to put forward that there's space for you, trying to make sure. She really mastered that and she brought that to young people who basically had been shut down by adults in life, whether they were teachers or parents or other people." - MaryKay
			Building collective efficacy	Describing opportunities to work in a group of young people to effect change	"All these different ways that young people were appearing in the world, all these different issues that young people were having, Dorothy tried to create communal ways, community ways for young people to support each other in being able to get through this transition to a healthy adulthood. They care about each other, and care about the community at the same time." - MaryKay
			Addressing root causes	Describing opportunities to consider the underlying causes of social issues and how to address them at their core	"I think it's pretty amazing that that happened, and it was in those discussion groups, it was in the camaraderie, it was in the sharing of understanding information from the days of what do you do at that event and building, going from there to, "Okay, but why is that building abandoned? How come it's in this state? What the hell is redlining? What are we doing with developers? Why can't we get a developer to do something good for us? How can we have those kinds of exchanges? How do we engage political people? Why are they important anyway?" That sort of stuff." - Kelly
			Centering youth voice	Describing how youths' voices (needs, opinions, goals, questions etc.) were centered in YAP programs (including which programs were developed, how they were developed, and how social change within them was pursued)	"This was the place that we had a voice. This was the place where we were seen as individuals and where there were all these people who acted like what we thought actually mattered. That's what you're going to do and you get a wonderful contribution out of that. You get commitment and that's what she got. And she did it for years. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That is not far from the theology of youth development. The theology of Youth Development is that young people get trained to be good adults by treating them like they are already good adults. So this whole concept, you respect young people. If you simply respect them, they come to respect themselves and then they come to respect everybody else. Suddenly they are respected [inaudible 00:16:06]. That's what she was doing with her own flavor, with her own expression. That's what the programs were about. That's why I think they were so successful. - MaryKay

			Responsive adults	Describing how adults listened to young people and supported their ideas/goals/plans	"I thought it was really perfect that you had this organization that had all of these programs that could engage you wherever your heart was leaning, whether it was work, whether it was doing community activism, whether it was... There were so many different things that she was doing. [inaudible 00:09:17] the processing. Whatever we came up with as young people, she just created a program, just created it. Yeah. Whatever, oh, we wish we had this. That's how Homes Away From Home came about. There were young people who said, "I'm homeless. I'm going from couch to couch." Or whatever. "I wish there was a way that we could get an apartment and live." Dorothy just created the program. She did a very responsive approach to youth development, letting young people articulate where they were and what they needed. And then she would create programs to try to fulfill that." - MaryKay
			Youth leadership and opportunities to grow	Describing opportunities to take on leadership roles and move into different spaces in (and beyond) the organization that allowed for personal growth	"I didn't go into Homes Away From Home after it opened, but I was able to be put on the board. I became a board member of Homes Away From Home. It is very poignant because by the time that happened I had been living on my own as a teenager for two years, 18 and 19, so I really understood what it was like to be independent and just to be out there and to be responsible for everything." - MaryKay
			Choice and interest-alignment	Describing opportunities to explore different interests and choose how to engage in YAP	"The minute that I went there and I was involved in a number of things, there was just a council of young people who were working on political issues and working on community issues, so I was a part of that. I'm sorry, I can't remember what everything was called because it was so long ago. But I was a part of that. And then I definitely did the Outward Bound stuff. It's what got me to Maine and Georgia and we did all this stuff, the outer banks of North Carolina. And then I was involved in Homes Away From Home." -MaryKay

	Meeting broader developmental needs	Program mechanisms supportive of positive youth development and wellbeing	Relationships	Describing relationships with peers and adults that supported development (civic and beyond)	"And the dialogues, I'm not really sure how they did this, but they never... I just thought about that, it never took on a competitive spirit. It never took on a... Because somehow, at our core, it being our community, I think made it nonsensical to compete, because we were all trying to reach the same goal from different perspectives or different passions or different insights about what was necessary. I think navigating, because we were teenagers, sexual chemistry or preferences, who drank or who smoked weed or who was a great student, I think we probably recognized those things at times. But again, when we recognized stuff that was deficient, it wasn't a deficiency in people, it was a deficiency in the resources people had to be in better positions." - Chantay
			Resources	Describing access to resources for safety, care, and wellbeing facilitated through YAP	"This was a time in which there was a lot of teen pregnancy, so of course she opens a teen pregnancy program. She has housing for teen mothers. Whether you were a young woman who had a baby, there was a program for you and a housing program. Nobody would do that. Who was housing teen moms? Nobody. All these different ways that young people were appearing in the world, all these different issues that young people were having, Dorothy tried to create communal ways, community ways for young people to support each other in being able to get through this transition to a healthy adulthood." - MaryKay
			"World opening" opportunities	Describing opportunities to explore the world and experience new challenges outside of one's comfort zone	"And then the third piece that I really appreciate, maybe this was the most important piece to me, was that she was bent on exposing us to things that I think living in East Harlem and Harlem we never would've been exposed to. That program started me off on travel. She had the organization, Outward Bound, come in. What they were doing were these wilderness trips where they would take you out and they would take you camping. It was for inner city youth. The whole idea of sleeping outside, oh my God, that was crazy. I got involved in that and that kicked off for me a world of travel that led me to be able to travel to... I think I've been to maybe 40 of the states in the United States, which is crazy. And then I visited 48 countries in the world". -MaryKay

			Access to education	Describing opportunities facilitated by/supported by YAP for young people to pursue their educational goals	<p>“So many of us had dropped out of school, were dropping out of school, were unhappy with school. And at that time there was a school called Park East, which I think is still here. It's in East Harlem, on 105th Street. And several of us went to Park East. And one of the people who worked for YAP, also worked for Park East. Long story short, we negotiated for the We Are Somebody Leadership School to be an annex of Park East High School. And so we did a good part of our learning at the We Are Somebody Leadership School. We had to do some of our basic classes at Park East and we had to do, I think those standardized tests at Park East. But that was our creation. We helped hire teachers there as well. We helped identify some of the stuff we wanted in the curriculum. And it had a lot to do with our history and who we are, and teaching that was different. Not necessarily content that was different, but we wanted a delivery that was not so top-heavy, in terms of adults and the usual power structure. We wanted more of, okay, why is this important for us to know if this is not something that is interesting us? And being able to have a dialogue about that. And having teachers that represented us better. We had an Indian teacher, we had African folks, we had younger staff or teachers. Our classroom was in the bottom of a church, and separate from those big institutional buildings that tend to be schools. And so it was our creation based on a need we saw and not a place that represented what we needed, so we created it.” - Chantay</p>
	Fostering wellbeing	Ways in which YAP fostered youths' ability to thrive mentally, physically, and emotionally; aspects of healthy development fostered by YAP	Safety	Providing a space where young people felt safe	<p>“Because Dorothy has a way of making everybody feel important. And when you, when you, when you feel like people value your opinion. and who you are as an individual. you become comfortable, and you feel like you. You know, you are respected and you belong, and you know you. You feel protected, and you also feel like you need to be protective. And so. Yeah, that's why I felt safe. - Santos</p>

			Belonging	Cultivating a space where young people felt included and accepted, and like part of a group	"I think the reason why you can pull together even a handful of people from those days and have them come and have them do stuff, is because Youth Action Program ended up being very skilled at creating an atmosphere of belonging, an atmosphere of belonging, which as you know by now is rare in this society. It's rare, very hard. Wherever you go to find an atmosphere where no matter who you are, no matter how you're coming in, no matter what condition you're in, you belong here. You belong here. That's what she was good at doing. She was good at, if you were having problems the group got rallied around you, so there wasn't this rejection, there was no hierarchy because everybody got a turn to lead. It prevented the creation of a hierarchy of certain leaders and certain stuff. Lots of rewards and acknowledgement when you did contribute." - MaryKay
			Joy/happiness	Offering opportunities for joy and happiness	"Oh, it was. It was a great moment. You know a time in my life ...I was very happy then. I mean not to say I'm not happy now, but as a young person, you know, who lived in a in a community that had drugs, lot of bad things going on, I felt safe when I was at YAP so yeah, that picture, represents happiness and safety." - Santos
			Hope	Creating a sense of hopefulness about one's future, one's community, or one's sense that change is possible	"Well, I would say that hopelessness, a lot of what we see in the attitudes of a lot of community residents, is hopelessness. Because they just feel, 'I'm here. There's nothing I can really do to change my environment.' In fact, that's not true. It takes work, but you can, if you know the avenues, if you know how to do grassroots organizing, if you know how to interact with your elected officials and really know the political process, what it really is like; if you learn about fundraising, you change them, you move from a perspective of hopelessness to a perspective of having hope." _ M. Gladwell
			Self actualization	Facilitating opportunities for young people to become new and better versions of themselves; fulfilling talents, skills, or goals	"So when I was attending the Youth Action Program, ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to be a police officer. That was my dream job, to become a police officer. In the 1980s when the crack epidemic hit the city, I lost two brothers to ... It was three, it's five children. I'm the youngest. The two oldest were my brothers. We ended up losing them to the crack epidemic. They ended up on drugs and they ended up dying. That sort of motivated me even more to becoming a police

					officer to make a difference in the Community. Youth Action Program helped me in pursuing my dreams, not so much directly in becoming a police officer, but just the leadership skills that they taught me, the attention that they gave me that I wasn't getting at home." - Rey
			Receiving care	Times when participants received care from YAP; times when they were unable to help others but needed help themselves	"There were rough patches of my life. You know. Sometimes you distance yourself from stuff and because of what's going on in your personal life. Also, you know, there were times where I wasn't involved at all. But I never stopped thinking about my community. Now, I couldn't do anything back then, I couldn't, you know, because I needed to help right? But you know, because of that, I wanted to be involved with young people, you know, and it helped me. Sometimes you know, when you think you're not enough. And you think about all the stuff that you did prior to getting to a point. Well, you feel down then, you know. I could thank the people from the Youth Action Program and Hotline Cares, for always, we always pushed each other. and I learned to, you know, to get back up." - Santos
	Sociopolitical climate	Describing the broader social, economic, and political landscape			"I totally get it. I totally get it. It was wonderful. It raises so many issues, because as we got into the '80s, of course it became harder and harder. You imagine, [inaudible 00:26:11], Ronald Reagan comes in and we get a political transformation that says basically the New Deal is over. That New Deal shit, that is gone. Now it's the corporate sector. There was tremendous pressure coming from foundations and other sources. Of course, the government sources of money dried up. Some of the money that she had coming into the late '70s or whatever were government sources of money and then that began to transform. Now it's like, you see, they will fund YARC, but they're not going to fund anything else. They'll fund construction, but the stuff that she was doing that was empowering people, that was politicizing people, there's no government money for that." - MaryKay