YOUNG MINDS MATTER

TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES COLLECTIVELY

2023 CONFERENCE PROGRAM



Hogg Foundation *for* Mental Health

PREVENTION INSTITUTE

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

1. Demonstrate the power of engaging youth and resident leaders from historically excluded groups (people and communities who have typically been left out of the conversation but are most impacted by the decisions made about them) in all aspects of collaborative efforts to improve communities.
2. Engage in candid and productive discussions about how structural inequities (caused by unfair practices and policies) and racism impact the mental well-being of children and youth of color and their families.
3. Explore "upstream" community approaches and real-life examples that strengthen community healing, connection, and justice.
4. Identify barriers and strategies to lift-up the voices of youth and residents as the decision makers and leaders of their community.
5. Connect presenters and attendees as community change agents, prepared to implement work together.

LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

- **Wifi Information:** Free internet is available at **'HCDE-Guest'**. No password is required.
- Use the hashtag **#YoungMindsMatter23** to join the conversation on social media. Feel free to tag the Hogg Foundation and Prevention Institute in your posts and stories. We hope you will share your learnings, observations, and photos throughout the day on Instagram and Twitter/X!

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- **Art Space and Comfort Room:** A room in the Science Building (805 Reid St; located on 1st floor parking lot across the street) is available as an art space and comfort room during the day.
- **Accessibility and Information Table:** If you need assistance today, please inform a staff member or visit the accessibility and information table.

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GENERAL SCHEDULE

8:00 - 9:00 AM	REGISTRATION OPENS & BREAKFAST
9:00 - 9:45 AM	WELCOME & OPENING **OPENING PANEL:** *IMPROVING MENTAL WELLBEING WITHIN SCHOOL SETTINGS: A CONVERSATION WITH YOUTH VOICES FOR CHANGE* *Join us to hear from Youth Voices for Change student advocates and leaders in conversation with a mental health professional to understand the current needs of youth and discuss ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of students.*
10:00 - 10:50 AM	SESSION(S)
Break & Move to Sessions	
11:00 - 11:50 AM	SESSION(S)
11:50 - 12:50 PM	LUNCH & POSTER PRESENTATIONS
Break & Move to Sessions	
1:00 - 1:50 PM	SESSION(S)
Break & Move to Sessions	
2:00 - 2:50 PM	SESSION(S)
Break & Move to Sessions	
3:00 - 3:30 PM	CLOSING & CALL TO ACTION
3:30 - 4:00 PM	NETWORKING

YOUNG MINDS MATTER 2023 CONFERENCE PROGRAM SCHEDULE

	ROOM 501	ROOM 502	ROOM 503	ROOM 500	ROOM 504	SCIENCE BLDG.
10:00 AM	*Youth to Youth: Bridging the Divide in Underserved Communities*; Houston Health Department	*The Recipe: How Culture, Community, Youth Empowerment, and Healing Practices Can Prevent Community Violence Exposure Among Youth of Color*; TAMU Psychology	*Mobilizing Youth for Mental Health Advocacy;* Young Invincibles *State of Schools: How Communities Can Advocate to Improve School Quality*; Good Reason Houston	*Building Strong Minds: Empowering Youth Mental Health*; Real Queens Fix Each Other's Crowns	*Mental Health for All: The Jed Foundation's (JED) Comprehensive Approach to Building Mental Health Supports with Texas Schools*; The JED Foundation	**OPEN SPACE** ART ROOM/ COMFORT SPACE; AVAILABLE TO ANYONE
11:00 AM	*Crossing Paths: Community Partnerships to Promote Wellbeing*; Fit Houston, OST/ South Union Go Neighborhoods	*Timeline of Resistance: Liberation Towards Anti-Racism*; Prevention Institute	*Who's Public Safety? Police in Schools and Curating Safe Spaces for Students*; Community Activist Panel	*fREADom to Learn: Reimagining Civic Engagement in Texas Public Schools*; Children's Defense Fund Texas	*Mental Effects on Younger Generations Due to Economical and Sociological Influence*; Mt. Zion Baptist Church	*Brush Your Stress Away*; HUG ME Ink
1:00 PM	*Separated, Isolated, and Uprooted: How Housing Instability Harms Youth Mental Health*; AFL-CIO, Collective Action for Youth	*Stepping Into Our Power: How To Build Anti-Racist Power Through Story-Telling*; RE Collective and Ukombozi Fellows	*Youth Empowerment and Community Engagement in the Asian-American Community*; Project Rise & Shine Youth Leaders	*Youth Work is Self Work*; U.S Dream Academy	*Transformative Power of Alternative Peer Group Models;* Palmer Drug Abuse Program - Houston; Youth From Program	**OPEN SPACE** ART ROOM/ COMFORT SPACE; AVAILABLE TO ANYONE
2:00 PM	*Stories of Our Community*; Asian Americans Attaining Awareness Collaborative	*Using Youth Voice to Conceptualize Social Justice*; The Future is Us - Galveston	*Building Beloved Community Centering LGBTQIA+ Youth in the South*; The Mahogany Project	*Leveraging Ecosystems to Meet Diverse Youth & Family Needs with Strength & Collaboration*; Texas Partnership for Out of School Time	*The Stories of Gulfton*; The Garden, St. Luke's Methodist Church	*Brush Your Stress Away*; HUG ME Ink

KEY: = WORKSHOP = PANEL = HYBRID LIVESTREAM

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TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES COLLECTIVELY

IN-PERSON WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (PART I)

	ROOM 501	ROOM 502 (HYBRID)	ROOM 503 (HYBRID)
10:00 AM	*Youth to Youth: Bridging the Divide in Underserved Communities;* Houston Health Department	*The Recipe: How Culture, Community, Youth Empowerment, and Healing Practices Can Prevent Community Violence Exposure Among Youth of Color*; TAMU Psychology	*Mobilizing Youth for Mental Health Advocacy;* Young Invincibles *State of Schools: How Communities Can Advocate to Improve School Quality*; Good Reason Houston
11:00 AM	*Crossing Paths: Community Partnerships to Promote Wellbeing;* Fit Houston, OST/ South Union Go Neighborhoods	*Timeline of Resistance: Liberation Towards Anti-Racism*; Prevention Institute	*Who's Public Safety? Police in Schools and Curating Safe Spaces for Students*; Community Activist Panel
1:00 PM	*Separated, Isolated, and Uprooted: How Housing Instability Harms Youth Mental Health;* AFL-CIO, Collective Action for Youth	*Stepping Into Our Power: How To Build Anti-Racist Power Through Story-Telling*; RE Collective and Ukombozi Fellows	*Youth Empowerment and Community Engagement in the Asian-American Community*; Project Rise & Shine Youth Leaders
2:00 PM	*Stories of Our Community;* Asian Americans Attaining Awareness Collaborative	*Using Youth Voice to Conceptualize Social Justice*; The Future is Us - Galveston	*Building Beloved Community Centering LGBTQIA+ Youth in the South*; The Mahogany Project

KEY: = WORKSHOP = PANEL = HYBRID LIVESTREAM

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IN-PERSON WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (PART II)

	ROOM 500	ROOM 504	SCIENCE BUILDING
10:00 AM	*Building Strong Minds: Empowering Youth Mental Health;* Real Queens Fix Each Other's Crowns	*Mental Health for All: The Jed Foundation's (JED) Comprehensive Approach to Building Mental Health Supports with Texas Schools;* The JED Foundation	**OPEN SPACE** ART ROOM/ COMFORT SPACE; AVAILABLE TO ANYONE
11:00 AM	*fREADom to Learn: Reimagining Civic Engagement in Texas Public Schools;* Children's Defense Fund Texas	*Mental Effects on Younger Generations Due to Economical and Sociological Influence;* Mt. Zion Baptist Church	*Brush Your Stress Away;* HUG ME Ink
1:00 PM	*Youth Work is Self Work;* U.S Dream Academy	*Transformative Power of Alternative Peer Group Models in Promoting Mental Health and Community Well-Being; Palmer Drug Abuse Program - Houston;* Youth From Program	**OPEN SPACE** ART ROOM/ COMFORT SPACE; AVAILABLE TO ANYONE
2:00 PM	*Leveraging Ecosystems to Meet Diverse Youth & Family Needs with Strength & Collaboration;* Texas Partnership for Out of School Time	*The Stories of Gulfton;* The Garden, St. Luke's Methodist Church	*Brush Your Stress Away;* HUG ME Ink

KEY: = WORKSHOP = PANEL = HYBRID LIVESTREAM

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VIRTUAL/ HYBRID WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

JOIN US VIA ZOOM HERE.

	ZOOM ACCESS ONLY	RM. 502 AND ZOOM	RM. 503 AND ZOOM
10:00 AM	*A Community Approach to Improving Access to Behavioral Health Services;* Driscoll Children's Hospital Behavioral Health	*The Recipe: How Culture, Community, Youth Empowerment, and Healing Practices Can Prevent Community Violence Exposure Among Youth of Color*; TAMU Psychology	*Mobilizing Youth for Mental Health Advocacy;* Young Invincibles *State of Schools: How Communities Can Advocate to Improve School Quality*; Young Invincibles & Good Reason Houston
11:00 AM	*Centering Youth Voices in Environmental Action;* Steve Hicks School of Social Work & Youth from Pharr-San Juan-Alamo High School	*Timeline of Resistance: Liberation Towards Anti-Racism*; Prevention Institute	*Who's Public Safety? Police in Schools and Curating Safe Spaces for Students*; Community Activist Panel
1:00 PM	*Supporting Youth Well-Being: Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse Through Leadership;* The VIRTUS Programs	*Stepping Into Our Power: How To Build Anti-Racist Power Through Story-Telling*; RE Collective and Ukombozi Fellows	*Youth Empowerment and Community Engagement in the Asian-American Community*; Project Rise & Shine Youth Leaders
2:00 PM	*The Defensive Line Vision: A World Where No Young Person of Color Dies by Suicide;* The Defense Line	*Using Youth Voice to Conceptualize Social Justice*; The Future is Us - Galveston	*Building Beloved Community Centering LGBTQIA+ Youth in the South*; The Mahogany Project

KEY: = WORKSHOP = PANEL = HYBRID LIVESTREAM

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POSTER PRESENTERS

- ***Assisting Freshman*** — Daniel Gutierrez, *UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School*
- ***Cultural Threads of Healing: Weaving Resilience Through Historical Trauma* —** Sai Keerthi Annam, *UTHealth Houston School of Public Health*
- ***Effects of Covid on Mental Health*** — Ashlee Young, Master's Student, *Texas Southern University*
- ***Enhancing Mental Health Support in Houston ISD*** — Natalie Parks, *UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School*
- ***Empowering Youth: Strategies to Promote Well-Being and Prevent Substance Abuse Among Houston High School and College Students*** — John Reed, *UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School*
- ***Fostering Well-being through Interactive Self-Care Sessions and Creative Healthy Environments: Exploring the Synergy of Healing Spaces, Art, and Personal Wellness*** — Neeharika Prathapa, *UTHealth Houston School of Public Health*
- ***Junior Street Captains as Youth LEADERS (Leading, Educating, and Advocating for Delivering Empowerment Through Resilience Skills)* —** Dwanette Jackson, Street Captain; Maria Rodriguez, Vice President, *Reaching Richmond Community Collaborative*; Regina Garza, Community Health Manager, *AccessHealth*
- ***Kwentuhan and Community: A Mental Health Project for Filipino Nurses in Houston*** — Patricia Guzman and Isabel Kilroy, *UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School*
- ***"Let's Talk About It:" Implementation of Mindfulness Small Group for Previously Unhoused Teen Girls*** — Amira Bajracharya and Bryana Stigers, *UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School*
- ***Meta-Review of Innovative Approaches to School-Based Mental Health Interventions: A Comprehensive Exploration*** — Himabindu Reddy Basani, *UTHealth Houston School of Public Health*



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POSTER PRESENTERS

- ***More Than Self Care: Students Speaking Out For Mental Health*** **—** Naomi Cruz Ojeda, *Young Invincibles, Hogg Foundation Mental Health Policy Fellow*

- ***Multi-Dimensional Community Based Interventions Approach To Improve Access To Mental Health Services In Asian Communities*** — Anila Khan, *Asian Americans Attaining Awareness Collaborative*

- ***School-Based Violence Associated with Suicidality in Texas Sexual Minority High School Adolescents*** — Morgan James Grant, MS, MBA, CHES, CPH, *Department of Health Behavior, School of Public Health and Center for Health Equity and Evaluation Research, School of Public Health, Texas A&M University*

- ***Through the Eyes of the Community PhotoVoice Project*** — *East End Communities Photovoice Youth Photographers*

- ***Utilizing Interactive Journals to Improve Mental Health in Youth with Chronic Illnesses*** — Amaya Perkinsm, *Integral Care*

- ***Vouch4Home: Transforming Housing Stability with a Digital Health Resource Hub*** — Pranav Mehta, *UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School*

- ***Youth Community Health Workers: Fighting Covid Myths and Advocating for Healthier Communities in New Britain, Connecticut*** — Neveah Navarro, Youth Intern, *YWCA New Britain*; Taijonna Lebby, Youth Intern, *YWCA New Britain*; Julianna Cyr, Youth Development Programs, Assistant Director, *YWCA New Britain*; Zanett Rosado, Assistant CHW Supervisor, *YWCA New Britain*, *Youth CHW*



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2023 SESSIONS

10:00 — 10:50 AM

ROOM 501

PANEL: YOUTH TO YOUTH: BRIDGING THE DIVIDE IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Panelists: Kalyn Joseph, BA, Community Involvement Coordinator; Destiny Richardson, Senior Peer Wellness Specialist; Bre'Ana Treadwell, Peer Wellness Specialist; Lennisha Walker, MPH — *Houston Health Department*

Session Description: Through funding from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, the Houston Health Department launched its Peer Wellness Specialist (PWS) Training Program for Transition-Age Youth (TAY) ages 14-24. PWS' help increase youth voice and participation in health-centered services, provide evidence-informed education, peer support services and provide mentorships in local High Schools and community settings. This panel discussion will allow participants a glimpse into the impacts and effectiveness of youth peer-to-peer supports, community connections, and self-advocacy. An interdisciplinary team of panelists (a student and parent who has been served by the PWS, a Peer Wellness Specialist, a PWS Program Developer, and a PWS Supervisor) will discuss the development and implementation of the Peer Wellness Specialist Training Program and its impacts on healing, connection, and justice in Houston and Harris County.

ROOM 502 (HYBRID)

WORKSHOP: THE RECIPE: HOW CULTURE, COMMUNITY, YOUTH EMPOWERMENT, AND HEALING PRACTICES CAN PREVENT COMMUNITY VIOLENCE EXPOSURE AMONG YOUTH OF COLOR

Presenters: Dr. Noni Gaylord-Harden; Dr. Deon Brown; Robyn Douglas; Jasmine Alli; Elizabeth Otto; Danielle Porter — *Texas A&M University*

Session Description: Exposure to community violence is disproportionately higher in disinvested, predominantly Black and Latinx communities. Researchers and practitioners have called for increased attention to strength-based perspectives, such as self-care practices, critical consciousness development, community mental health resources, and other prosocial civic behaviors as avenues for healing and wellness for youth from marginalized communities. This session aims to explore the root causes of violence in disinvested communities, the impact of exposure to community violence on youth's mental health, and discuss the power of youth-led and community-engaged mental health work to address root causes and prevent further violence. It will provide attendees an opportunity to learn strategies that engage community members and leaders, empower youth voices, and center healing that ultimately leads to the reduction of community violence and its effects on the mental well-being of youth and families.



2023 SESSIONS

10:00 — 10:50 AM

ROOM 503 (HYBRID)
<u>WORKSHOP 1:</u> MOBILIZING YOUTH FOR MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

Presenters: Naomi Cruz Ojeda — *Young Invincibles*; Greg Norwood — *Texas Young Advocates, Young Invincibles*

Session Description: Young Invincibles (YI) is at the forefront of empowering youth in Texas to shape the current and future state of mental health systems and renew our country's social contract for health care for all. In this session, YI will explore the lessons we've learned during the 88th Legislative session, and discuss creative advocacy tactics through an interactive exercise. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of how to build strong relationships with young adult communities on the ground and help them transform their passion and lived experiences into skillful grassroots advocacy.

<u>WORKSHOP 2:</u> STATE OF SCHOOLS: HOW COMMUNITIES CAN ADVOCATE TO IMPROVE SCHOOL QUALITY

Presenter: Jasmine Colvin — *Good Reason Houston*

Session Description: Community plays an important role in education and has a valuable perspective regarding issues and actions taken by their school board officials. This session will explore the elements of what makes a quality school, which include accountability, educator effectiveness, early learning, and high quality instructional materials. Participants will be able to understand how these components impact student achievement and leave with skills and knowledge of how to effectively advocate to improve the quality of schools in Houston.

ROOM 500
<u>WORKSHOP:</u> BUILDING STRONG MINDS: EMPOWERING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Presenters: Brandie Meister — *Real Queens Fix Each Other's Crowns;* Jamila "Mila" Davis, MSW — *Colors of Austin Counseling*

Session Description: In this dynamic, interactive workshop, participants will engage in open discussions, engaging activities, and mindfulness practices aimed at fostering self-awareness, emotional resilience, and coping strategies. Through this empowering experience, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of mental health, reduce stigma, and learn how to create a supportive environment for themselves and their peers. This workshop lays the foundation for a brighter future by empowering youth to take control of their mental health journey and build a resilient mindset.



2023 SESSIONS

10:00 — 10:50 AM

ROOM 504

<u>PANEL:</u> MENTAL HEALTH FOR ALL: THE JED FOUNDATION'S (JED) COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO BUILDING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS WITH TEXAS SCHOOLS

Panelists: Felicia Martin, Regional Director, Texas; Jennifer Reed, Sr. Director, School and District Programs; Dr. Tony Walker, Sr. VP, Academic Programs — *The Jed Foundation*

Session Description: Children spend almost all their time in schools, making them an effective environment to improve our youth mental health epidemic meaningfully. Implementing comprehensive mental health systems improves student well-being and mental health outcomes while strengthening school climate and safety. This panel will include The Jed Foundation team and high school partners as they take a deeper dive into The Jed Foundation (JED)'s comprehensive, public health, campus-wide approach and how it supports the mental health of all students works to prevent suicide on campuses nationally.

VIRTUAL (ZOOM ACCESS)

<u>WORKSHOP:</u> A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO IMPROVING ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Presenters: Lisa McKenna; Brieanna Dominguez; Michelle Lopez Goodman, MSN, RN, Senior Director- Care Coordination — *Driscoll Children's Hospital*

Session Description: The South Texas region, with its large rural areas, has meager pediatric behavioral health services. It has traditionally failed to recruit adequate mental health professionals. Children with behavioral health needs often lack insurance, adequate food, housing, and transportation. Many are undocumented or have parents who are undocumented. Driscoll Children's Hospital has sought to build community solutions available to children outside the walls of the children's hospital. Staffing schools with mental health personnel offering evidence based interventions has the potential for profound and measurable results. They will explore the outcomes of their Positive Parenting Program, integrated primary care medical home, and deploying mental health professionals in our schools: 1) Can parenting training reduce the prescription of ADHD meds in the young child? and 2) Can co-located mental health professionals in schools decrease the rates of self-harm, emergency department visits, and inpatient hospitalizations?



2023 SESSIONS

11:00 — 11:50 AM

ROOM 501
PANEL: CROSSING PATHS: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE WELLBEING

Panelists: Ed Pettitt, MPH, Founder — *Friends of Columbia Tap;* Lharissa Jacobs, MBA, Founder & Executive Director*;* Tania Terezon — *OST/South Union Health Improvement Partnership;* Milton Guardado — *OST/South Union Go Neighborhoods*

Session Description: Fit Houston's mission is to inspire vibrant bodies, minds, and communities through physical activity by working with other nonprofits, clinics, and schools across Greater Houston with a special focus on increasing physical activity and social fabric in under-resourced communities. Friends of Columbia Tap's mission is to tap into a more connected, equitable, and prosperous community for all with an eye on systems-level change for equitable access to places and spaces along and near the Columbia Tap Trail in Third Ward, Houston. OST/South Union GO Neighborhood's goal is to achieve positive transformation of Southeast Houston through community-based creative placemaking- empowering residents to bring values and community history to effect change through well-designed improvements to the physical environment. Join these three organizations for a panel discussion on community engagement, lifting community voice, and creating and sustaining lasting partnerships.

ROOM 502 (HYBRID)
WORKSHOP: TIMELINE OF RESISTANCE: LIBERATION TOWARDS ANTI-RACISM

Presenters: La'Quana Williams, Associate Program Director; Alberto Espiricueta, Program Assistant — *Prevention Institute*

Session Description: The workshop is guided by a virtual timeline which explores the social justice roots of public health, highlights historical and contemporary grassroots social and racial justice movements led by various racial and ethnic groups, and ends with a call to public health to reclaim its social reform origins to operationalize racial justice. Participants will be able to describe how various movements have fought to dismantle the systems that maintain racism in the US, identify how these movements' work and advocacy supports the conditions for healthy and thriving BIPOC communities, and relate with the college students who were leaders in their respective movement.



2023 SESSIONS

11:00 — 11:50 PM

ROOM 503 (HYBRID)
PANEL: WHO'S PUBLIC SAFETY? POLICE IN SCHOOLS AND CURATING SAFE SPACES FOR STUDENTS

Panelists: Ar'Sheill Monsanto, Author, Speaker — *Advocate;* Jaison Oliver, Educator — *Community Organizer;* Torrina Harris, Director of Philanthropy — *Houston Area Women's Center*

Session Description: The presence of police in school has a harmful impact on the mental and physical health of Black and Brown students. Research shows that students report feeling less safe, more stressed, and more anxious in schools with police officers. Given the passage of HB 3 which aims to harden schools and deploy more law enforcement officers on campus while doing little to nothing to increase mental health resources, we can't help but question who's public safety is being prioritized? This panel will explore historical examples of inequitable policies and conclude with action steps on how to better listen and support students.

ROOM 500
WORKSHOP: fREADom TO LEARN: REIMAGINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Presenters: Maggie Stern, Program and Policy Manager for Youth Engagement*;* Clarissa Webb, Community Engagement Manager — *Children's Defense Fund of Texas*

Session Description: As the Texas legislature and other public officials increasingly limit the educational tools to which students have access, CDF and a host of partners are working to equip young people with tools to know their rights and advocate for themselves. We will explore these programs and initiatives with an eye for how they can help young people in your community.

ROOM 504
WORKSHOP: MENTAL EFFECTS ON YOUNGER GENERATIONS DUE TO ECONOMICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL INFLUENCE

Presenters: Kiounis Williams, Young Adult President; Sydney Williams, Youth Director — *Mt. Zion Baptist Church*

Session Description: This will be an open dialogue discussion from experience and community connection. Participants will explore the impact of economic inequality on youth mental health, social media and the mental health of young people, and the mental health toll of uncertain economic futures.



2023 SESSIONS

11:00 — 11:50 PM

SCIENCE BUILDING
ART WORKSHOP: BRUSH YOUR STRESS AWAY

Presenter: Nicholas Holstein, Executive Director — *HUG ME Ink*

Session Description: This interactive workshop will show attendees how art is a form of recovery. Participants will release their own self-expression and take home a piece of art they created during the workshop. Attendees will learn how to bring and create their own arts workshop for their community. Be free! Be Creative!

VIRTUAL (ZOOM ACCESS)
WORKSHOP: CENTERING YOUTH VOICES IN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

Presenters: Ana Chatham, LCSW, Steve Hicks School of Social Work; Carmen Valdez, PhD, Dell Medical School, Steve Hicks School of Social Work — *University of Texas at Austin;* Regina Bocanegra — *Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Thomas Jefferson T-STEM Early College High School;* Elisa Ruiz — *Graduate of Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Thomas Jefferson T-STEM Early College High School*

Session Description: Through photovoice and community-based participatory research, we partnered with minoritized high school youth from East Austin and the Rio Grande Valley to examine youth experiences of environmental burdens and hazards, their impact on health and wellbeing, and youth ideas for environmental action. Youth shared from their experiential knowledge and engaged in activities to strengthen their awareness of historic and contextual dynamics framing their lived experiences. In this workshop, the audience will engage in some of the activities in which the youth participated. We will share what youth identified as environmental burdens in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods and their proposed solutions. We will reflect on the impact of youth-engaged research and discuss how participants can incorporate this knowledge to both amplify youth's voices and incorporate youth proposed solutions.



2023 SESSIONS

1:00 — 1:50 PM

ROOM 501

<u>WORKSHOP:</u> SEPARATED, ISOLATED, AND UPROOTED: HOW HOUSING INSTABILITY HARMS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Presenters: Sarah Montgomery, Housing Justice Organizer — *Gulf Coast Area Labor Federation and Texas Housers;* Yvanna, Project Associate— *Collective Action 4 Youth*

Session Description: Children and youth remain one of the most oppressed classes in today's society due to their lack of autonomy and agency. The most salient example of this is when youth become housing unstable and the state becomes the administrator of their housing as a result of family policing, displacement, and poverty. This workshop is an anti-carceral abolitionist exploration of how youth are violently impacted by housing instability, resulting in negative mental health outcomes. Evidence shows that youth who experience housing instability and homelessness experience higher rates of depression, suicidality, alcoholism and substance use disorders.. While children's presence in the household is the highest predictor of an eviction, most municipalities fail to ensure strong protections against displacing children through the process of eviction.

ROOM 502 (HYBRID)

<u>PANEL:</u> STEPPING INTO OUR POWER: HOW TO BUILD ANTI-RACIST POWER THROUGH STORY-TELLING

Panelists: Sarah Crulcich MPH, RDN, LD, Ukombozi Fellow — *RE Collective;* Kennedy Henderson, Project Manager — *Equity Action Project*, Communications Associate — *Full Circle,* Strategies, Ukombozi Fellow — *RE Collective*; Vee Ramos, MSW, Ukombozi Fellow — *RE Collective*

Session Description: This panel discussion will focus on the use of anti-racist power structures to give agency and power to youth and young leaders within organizations that serve youth populations. The panelists will share frameworks and experiences with power structures that allow youth and older generations to share power and collaborate as examples of how these structures can positively impact all individuals involved. If youth-focused organizations undertook anti-racist power structures, there would be opportunities for youth to hold and share power giving them the tools to have a sense of agency within their own lives.



2023 SESSIONS

1:00 — 1:50 PM

ROOM 503 (HYBRID)

<u>PANEL:</u> YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE ASIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Panelists: Victoria Ou, Project Rise & Shine Youth Leader — *The Academy of Science and Technology in the Woodlands College Park High School;* Aila Jiang, Project Rise & Shine Youth Leader — *St. John's High School;* Andy Jiang, Project Rise & Shine Youth Leader — *Texas A&M University;* Lydia Tong, Project Rise & Shine Youth Leader — *Bellaire High School;* Furjen Deng — *Sam Houston State University and Light and Salt Association;* Sharon Cheng — *Light and Salt Association*

Session Description: The goal of the panel discussion is to highlight the experience regarding how to empower Asian-American (AA) young individuals and foster their active engagement in mental health initiatives in the AA community. With funding support from Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, Light and Salt Association and its partners formed the Project Rise and Shine (PRS) in 2019, a collaborative to improve mental wellbeing among AA youth in the greater Houston area. Youth leadership and Advocacy Program is one of PRS initiatives. In this panel discussion, four youth participants (Vitoria Ou, Aila Jiang, Andy Jiang, Lydia Tong) will share their experiences about participating in the youth internship program. Dr. Furjen Deng and Sharon Cheng will present the results from the pre and post assessment surveys and qualitative feedbacks from participants.

ROOM 500

<u>WORKSHOP:</u> YOUTH WORK IS SELF WORK

Presenters: MyKayla Searles-Houston; Fortune McDonald — *U.S. Dream Academy*

Session Description: "Youth Work is Self Work" suggests that engaging in activities or roles related to working with young people not only involves guiding and assisting them but also requires a degree of introspection, personal development, and self-awareness on the part of the youth worker. In essence, this concept highlights the idea that effective youth work goes beyond surface-level interaction and involves a deep understanding of oneself and one's own values, biases, and experiences.



2023 SESSIONS

1:00 — 1:50 PM

ROOM 504

<u>PANEL:</u> TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ALTERNATIVE PEER GROUP MODELS IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Panelists: Mariah Fountain, LMSW - Program Director; Beth Eversole, LCSW-S, CFSW, LCDC, Chief Executive — *Palmer Drug Abuse Program*

Session Description: The panel discussion delves into the profound impact of the Alternative Peer Group (APG) model on mental health promotion and community well-being, spotlighting the transformative potential of centering young people within recovery processes. The discourse underscores the APG's commitment to health, safety, equity, and inclusion, as both staff and youth perspectives converge on fostering a secure and inclusive environment. Engaging youth voices in mental health discussions takes center stage, illustrating how the APG model nurtures open dialogues that destigmatize mental health challenges. Safe spaces and therapeutic community practices are explored as pivotal elements that catalyze healing within the APG framework.

VIRTUAL (ZOOM ACCESS)

<u>WORKSHOP:</u> SUPPORTING YOUTH WELL-BEING: PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE THROUGH LEADERSHIP

Presenter: Crispin Ketelhut Montelione, Creative Director of Training and Content Development — *The VIRTUS Programs*

Session Description: One’s future health is directly impacted by what happens in childhood, and particularly the adverse childhood experience of child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a complex issue that negatively affects every culture, every community, and every demographic—where at least one in five girls, and one in ten boys are victims of abuse before adulthood in the U.S. CSA requires a multi-faceted approach to (a) prevent it, (b) stop it from continuing, and (c) put supportive measures in place for victim-survivor healing and restorative justice. While the onus of responsibility to protect youth is always that of adults, none of these goals are possible without additional youth partnership. This presentation addresses the partnership we must have with youth. Advocating for youth to be “agents of change”, stand up as leaders for healthy relationships, recognize appropriate boundaries, and have the words and knowledge to involve adults all must be a part of this preventative and response model.



2023 SESSIONS

2:00 — 2:50 PM

ROOM 501

PANEL: STORIES OF OUR COMMUNITY

Panelists: Nurbanu Amanullah, Youth Intern — *AAAA Youth Resilience initiative;* Fatema Jawadi, Intern — *AAAA Youth Resilience Initiative;* Shaoli Bhadra — *Preferred Communities Program;* Dr. Hina Azam, Executive Director — *IBN Sina Foundation;* Len Calderon — *People's Caring for Community Inc.;* Maisaa Zaza, Founder and CEO — *The Future Beyond Charity;* Dr. Aisha Siddiqui, Founder and Executive Director of Culture, Health – *Advancing Together;* Jason Lau, Project Manager — *DePelchin Children's Center;* Dr. Anila Khan, Community Behavioral Health Project Manager — *Asian American Health Coalition-HOPE Clinic*

Session Description: A panel discussion led by the Asian Americans Attaining Awareness collaborative where the panelists will share stories from the community. The stories will be those that were encountered during assessment and pilot programs implementation and how AAAA was able to make a difference.

ROOM 502 (HYBRID)

PANEL: USING YOUTH VOICE TO CONCEPTUALIZE SOCIAL JUSTICE

Panelists: Shanice Blair, Communities of Care Co-Coordinator — *The Future is US;* Phylicia French, Community Engagement Lead — *The Future is US*; Roxy Williamson — *Galveston Island Voter Education Resource & Services*; Torrina Harris, Policy Task Force Lead — *The Future is US,* Director of Philanthropy — *Houston Area Women's Center*; Jonathan Warren, Communities of Care Co-Coordinator — *The Future is US*

Session Description: Your voice is your power. When the decision is made to fight against oppressive systems, we must understand that social justice can take place in many ways. Often in ways that we fail to recognize. But, you have to recognize that you are already an agent of change. The Future is US Galveston has engaged in a variety of methods to cultivate and empower youth and community voices. Fighting for equity through social justice could be anything from self-care, to voting, to joining an organization, or even front-line direct action. Overcoming the barriers which create disparities and inequities in the school system which impact the most vulnerable students is the ultimate goal. Hear from members of The Future is US as we share how we have encouraged our community to become social agents of change.



2023 SESSIONS

2:00 — 2:50 PM

ROOM 503 (HYBRID)
<u>WORKSHOP:</u> BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY CENTERING LGBTQIA+ YOUTH IN THE SOUTH

Presenter: Verniss McFarland, III — *The Mahogany Project (TMP, Inc.)*

Session Description: The workshop seeks to cultivate an inclusive environment by emphasizing the importance of understanding the complex combination of characteristics and experiences that shape today's youth. Participants will understand the multitude of factors, including cultural differences, socioeconomic variations, and individual experiences, that contribute to the composition of the adolescent population. Establishing secure spaces tailored to the specific requirements of young people is a crucial component of community empowerment. The workshop provides a thorough analysis of the characteristics that define adolescent safety, examining the factors that contribute to a safe and nurturing environment. Participants are empowered to contribute to establishing resilient and thriving communities that withstand the measure of time by appreciating diversity, fostering youth leadership, and establishing secure spaces.

ROOM 500
<u>WORKSHOP:</u> LEVERAGING ECOSYSTEMS TO MEET DIVERSE YOUTH & FAMILY NEEDS WITH STRENGTH & COLLABORATION

Presenter: Jenna Courtney, Chief Executive Officer — *Texas Partnership for Out of School Time*

Session Description: Working alone, schools cannot meet the wide variety of needs of students and families. Partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) in a variety of settings—including in particular out of school time (OST) providers—are essential to understand and address diverse and unique needs across this state. In order to reach the full potential of thriving youth, many players in local expanded learning ecosystems must be meaningfully engaged, including and beyond just partnerships between schools and OST direct service providers. By expanding our notions of what OST means, we can truly expand opportunities for acknowledging the wide variety of places where youth learn and develop, are cared for and connected. By focusing on the partnerships and connections between local players as much as we tend to focus on what each player is doing for youth, a network of sustainable supports can be built.



2023 SESSIONS

2:00 — 2:50 PM

ROOM 504
<u>WORKSHOP:</u> THE STORIES OF GULFTON

Presenter: Alexander Lopez; Erika Ngo — *Gulfton Youth Community Staff Member*

Session Description: The Stories of Gulfton will be a presentation/exhibit designed to expose the audience to what, who, and where Guflton is. This workshop is through the lens of young people and their experiences within and outside of Gulfton. Covering topics such as mental health, housing, heat mapping, etc. The ultimate purpose is to capture Gulfton or at least its essence and share it with the broader Houston community.

SCIENCE BUILDING
<u>ART WORKSHOP:</u> BRUSH YOUR STRESS AWAY

Presenter: Nicholas Holstein, Executive Director — *HUG ME Ink*

Session Description: This interactive workshop will show attendees how art is a form of recovery. Participants will release their own self-expression and take home a piece of art they created during the workshop. Attendees will learn how to bring and create their own arts workshop for their community. Be free! Be Creative!

VIRTUAL (ZOOM ACCESS)
<u>WORKSHOP:</u> THE DEFENSIVE LINE VISION: A WORLD WHERE NO YOUNG PERSON OF COLOR DIES BY SUICIDE

Presenters: Martha H. Thomas, Chief Education Officer; Chris Thomas, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer — *The Defensive Line*

Session Description: Our workshop is built around the acronym: D-LINES. This training aims to clarify the teacher's role in supporting students' mental health by helping them find ways to naturally connect with students about their mental health and show them how to be the bridge to the resources that exist for their students in need. The training also walks teachers through a step-by-step plan to identify, intervene, and refer students in crisis or in need. The primary aim is to create better connections between the teacher and the student so that when a crisis arises, systems are in place to find appropriate support.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES COLLECTIVELY

2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This conference wouldn't have been possible without the contributions of an extraordinary group of staff, volunteers, and other supporters. The following individuals have each played a role in bringing the conference to life:

- **Conference Design Team:** Shanice Blair, Regina Garza, Torrina Harris, Brittany Hiett, Isaiah Hughes, Ryan Villarreal
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Thank You



YOUNG MINDS MATTER

2023 SPEAKERS

Jasmine Alli (she/her) is a third-year clinical psychology doctoral student at Texas A&M University and a member of the Youth Rising Lab. She is from Arlington, TX and completed her undergraduate studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests focus on trauma exposure and its impact on depression and anxiety among Black youth as well as family-based protective factors.

Nurbanu Amanullah is the youth intern for the AAAA Youth Resilience initiative. She was born in Yangon. Burmese is her first language, and can also speak Rohingya. She moved to the United States at 11 and began schooling in the fifth grade. The Nurbanu graduated from high school in May 2022 with honors and a 4.0 GPA. Currently, she is studying Biology A.S. in a Pre-Med program in college. She plans to transfer to a university after completing her associate degree to obtain their bachelor's degree and pursue her dream of becoming a physician. She is passionate about raising awareness about mental health in the community.

Dr. Hina Azam is the Executive Director at the IBN Sina Foundation. Originally from India, she migrated to the United States in 1997 and began working in healthcare administration. Dr. Azam joined the IBN Sina Foundation in 2017 as Chief Executive Officer and has since been responsible for overseeing operations at all 7 Ibn Sina Clinics. She has worked on various State Funded Programs and Grant funded projects covering areas such as Medical, Mental, and Dental Health, Research, General Operations, Covid-19 Testing and Vaccination Project, Hurricane Harvey, Disaster Relief, American Red Cross, and various other initiatives. Dr. Azam is a recipient of the President’s Lifetime Achievement Award and is passionate about serving the underserved community. She serves on the Board of the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, the India Culture Center, and the Advisory Board of Texas Health School. Dr. Azam possesses excellent outreach and communication skills and can motivate others in the spirit of collaboration. In her spare time, Dr. Azam loves to volunteer, mentor, travel, and help others.

Shaoli Bhadra oversees the Preferred Communities program, an ORR-funded intensive medical case management program for refugees, at YMCA International Services. She has been with the YMCA’s Preferred Communities program since 2014. As program director, she supervises a diverse team of community health workers, program coordinators, and case managers who serve at least 200 clients annually. Her interests include health equity, anthropology of health policy, and mental health issues around refugee displacement. She is currently attaining her MPH from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Shanice Blair recently moved to Virginia and completes her duties as Communities of Care Co-Coordinator remotely, though she comes back on occasion! While in Galveston, Shanice was a Licensed Professional Counselor-Associate, providing therapy services to youth and their families. Prior to that, she was a case manager, which provided her with insight into what barriers and resources are available in Galveston and the interconnectedness between systems that influence our community’s mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Shanice fell in love with the island and wants its history and community to be heard and celebrated. Shanice is a member of the board of directors for Big Brothers Big Sisters Gulf Coast, Juneteenth Legacy Project Committee Member, and a member of the Woodville Rosenwald Community Engagement Planning Committee.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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Regina Bocanegra is a sophomore at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Thomas Jefferson T-STEM Early College High School. She is passionate about the Earth's future and what it will look like. In the future, she hopes to continue engaging in eco-friendly practices. In her free time, she enjoys recycling, planting, and composting with her family.

Dr. Deon Brown is a postdoctoral research associate with the Youth Rising Lab. He is originally from Richmond, Virginia, which is where he also completed his doctoral program in developmental psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). His research focuses on parental emotion socialization and youths' emotional development among African-American families. More specifically, he is interested in how race-related experiences, Black cultural values, and masculine ideologies influence African Americans' emotion-related behaviors. His dissertation project explored low-income African-American fathers' beliefs about their own and their toddlers' negative emotions (i.e., sadness, anger). He is a Hip-Hop and mental health advocate and hopes his research will inform treatment among African-American male populations.

Len Calderon is a retired Certified Mental Health & Psychiatric Nurse by the American Nurse Credentialing Center (ANCC through October 2024), First Vice President, Director of Public Grant, and Program Coordinator for People Caring for - Community Inc., a 501 (c) non-profit Philippines Filipino American Organization. She developed Gising Na! (Wake Up!), a community outreach program to promote mental health, wellness, awareness and foster hope and resilience amongst the Filipino American community.

Ana Chatham, LCSW, is a doctoral student at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin. Ana's research is focused on improving the mental health and wellbeing of Latinx populations through culturally informed prevention, intervention, and structural changes. Her research is grounded in her 10 years of practice experience serving clients in micro, mezzo, and macro capacities in fields including family preservation, domestic violence, and mental health. Ana is a collaborator in various interdisciplinary participatory studies including a mental health needs assessment of rural communities in Mexico and a study on minoritized youth's experiences of environmental justice. Ana is a licensed clinical social worker in Texas. She graduated from Seton Hill University with a B.A. in Psychology and from Baylor University with an MSW. Her Master's program, funded by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, allowed her to participate in additional training to give her the vocabulary and insights needed to work with Spanish-speaking clients. Ana was born and raised on the border of Brazil and Uruguay and is fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, and English.

Sharon Cheng has a M.A. in Special Education from West Virginia University and serves as the director for the Special Needs Caring Center. She has more than 15 years of working experience as a therapeutic consultant/behavior specialist, behavior support professional, and service coordinator for special needs populations, such as individuals with autism, brain injuries, and other developmental disabilities. She helped establish the day program for individuals with special needs and currently serves as the project director for Project Rise and Shine, a 5-year program to improve the mental well-being of AA youth living in the Greater Houston area.

Jasmine Colvin is a native Houstonian and former math teacher. Her advocacy work at Good Reason Houston focuses on building partnerships and awareness around a shared vision for great public schools in Houston.

Jenna Courtney joined TXPOST in 2019, bringing more than a decade of policy making and advocacy experience from her time in and around the Texas Legislature. She focuses on the full integration of strategic objectives across program areas in order to maximize organizational effort and impact. Through her work, she seeks policy solutions and strives to develop diverse champions to drive progress and change in complex systems. She has extensive experience developing and managing nuanced and multi-faceted issue management campaigns that bridge media, government, and public relations to provide unified and targeted messages to engage stakeholders and influence decision-makers. Under her leadership, TXPOST has expanded its suite of services and supports, grown its staff, developed deeper and more extensive relationships across Texas, and applied metrics to measure success against organizational goals and objectives.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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Sarah Crulcich, MPH, RDN, LD (she/her) is a food systems dietitian nutritionist with experience in school nutrition, academic research, public policy, and food security. In 2019, she completed a fellowship in Washington DC working on Child Nutrition Reauthorization and later that year was awarded Young Dietitian of the Year in Southeast Texas. She also spearheaded several projects at the largest food bank in the world during the pandemic. While these were remarkable experiences, storytelling was one tool she did not utilize nearly enough in her journey when advocating for marginalized communities and for her own self-care. Sarah now recognizes and utilizes storytelling to help create a just food system that supports communities in upholding their traditions and well-being.

Jamila "Mila" Davis' educational journey began at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley in 2017, where she earned her Bachelor in Social Work, and continued at the University of Texas at Austin in 2019, where she received her Masters in Social Work. Since April 2021, she's been an invaluable part of the Colors of Austin Counseling family, bringing her unique blend of experiences to the field.Jamila's therapy style emphasizes creating a safe and nurturing space through empathy and humor, where clients can truly feel seen and secure. Her commitment is to guide clients back to a life they genuinely enjoy, using therapeutic techniques like CBT, DBT, MI, and SFBT. Jamila's passion extends to helping clients define and live safe, healthy lives on their terms, especially those from marginalized communities, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ individuals. As a military Veteran and a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself, her commitment is visible both in her work and her personal life. Before becoming a Licensed Master Social Worker, Jamila's identity was shaped by her experience as a disabled Military Veteran. Social work became her calling, as it allowed her to connect deeply with her clients and understand their daily struggles. Her passion is rooted in empowering, advocating for, and supporting her clients through active listening. Jamila firmly believes that you can navigate through the stressors on your journey to happiness, and she's here to guide you to the other side.

Dr. Furjen Deng is a Professor of the Department of Sociology at Sam Houston State University. Her current research interests include: cancer disparities, quality of life among cancer survivors, and program evaluation. Dr. Deng has authored/co-authored 25 referred journal articles or book charters, as well as 1 book written in Chinese. Working closely with community-based organizations, she has also written more than 30 grant proposals. Most of these grants helped uild the capacities of AA community-based organizations in Texas. The funding agencies included, but not limited to: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Navigator grants and Connections to Kids for Coverage, Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, Episcopal Health Foundation and Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Dr. Deng served as a project evaluator for several of these grants. At the community level, as a cancer survivor, Dr. Deng has been a tireless cancer advocate and a passionate volunteer within the community. She volunteers with the Light and Salt Association (LSA), CanCare Cancer Support, and Asian and Pacific Islander Cancer Survivors Network. Currently, she serves as chair of the board of directors for Health Education for Asians League of Houston and the Light and Salt Association.

Brieanna Dominguez, Licensed Master Social Worker in Corpus Christi, TX received her bachelor's in arts majoring in Sociology and Psychology from Texas A & M Corpus Christi as well as her MSW in Social Work through UTSA. Mrs. Dominguez has over 20 years of social work experience, five of these years spent in various child and adult behavioral health treatment settings and eleven years with Child Protective Services in both direct delivery and leadership. The past seven years have been spent working to serve complex members with special health care needs within the Driscoll Health Plan network and most recently management of the MCO's Behavioral Health Program with a focus on Triple P and Behavioral Health Integration.

Robyn Douglas is a third-year clinical doctoral graduate student in the Youth Rising Lab. She received her Bachelor's in Psychology from the University of Houston and her Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Sam Houston State University. She is interested in investigating prosocial behavior, critical consciousness, youth socio-political empowerment, cultural arts, and collectivist action as protective/healing factors for Black youth and youth of color exposed to community violence, racial trauma, and neighborhood poverty. She is a Texas A&M Aviles-Johnson Fellow and a Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellow.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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Alberto Espiricueta (he/him) is a Program Assistant at Prevention Institute, who -hails from Southeast Los Angeles and advocates for complete community between humans, flora, and fauna. He works across both the Healthy Equitable Communities and Safety and Well Being Teams. More specifically, Alberto supports the People, Parks, Power (P3 project), and serves as an integral part of our Health Equity and Racial Justice team. Prior to joining the Prevention Institute, he graduated from Georgetown University with a BA in government and a minor in environmental studies. Alberto has worked at The Planning Report covering LA planning news and at Enterprise Community Partners assisting in the production of affordable housing in LA. In his free time, Alberto volunteers with East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice on issues such as tenant justice and active transportation.

Beth Eversole, LCSW-S, CFSW, LCDC is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Supervisor in the state of Texas as well as a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor and Certified Financial Social Worker. She received her Masters degree from the University of Houston GCSW and Bachelors in Social Work from Radford University. In 2021, she received the “Most Admired CEO” Award by the Houston Business Journal. She has experience in inpatient hospitalization, residential, and outpatient psychiatric and substance use disorder facilities. She is passionate about personal and professional development, fundraising, and program improvement at PDAP. She believes in PDAP’s mission to support and inspire hope for each new generation while offering teens and their families a safe and secure place to recover – free of charge.

Mariah Fountain, LMSW is a Licensed Masters Social Worker and graduate of The State University of New York at Albany’s School of Social Welfare. She has extensive experience and true passion for working with children and families that have experienced and survived trauma. Throughout her time in the field, she has worked in mental health clinics, psychiatric inpatient units, community outreach organizations, schools, and residential treatment centers. As Program Director, Mariah is committed to helping remove barriers to access of care while providing high quality services and she share’s in PDAP’s authentic commitment to help children and families heal.

Phylicia French is an international author, entrepreneur, motivational speaker, mental health educator, creative expressions specialist, community activist, and breakthrough coach from Galveston, Texas. As the community engagement lead for The Future is US, Phylicia believes in the power of community buy-in, equity, unity, and true collaboration. Her mission is to focus on transformative and impactful community efforts that provide access, support, education, creative outlets, fun, and wellness opportunities to Galveston youth and families.

Dr. Noni Gaylord-Harden is a professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Texas A&M University and director of the Youth Rising Lab. Dr. Gaylord-Harden is a clinical psychologist, and over the past two decades, she has conducted research on how traumatic stress impacts mental health in Black youth and families. Her most recent work examines the impact of community violence exposure and traumatic loss on Black adolescents and families in disinvested, urban communities. She and her team seek to address disparities in community violence exposure and traumatic loss and minimize the effects of violence exposure by enhancing existing strengths and assets of Black youth, families, and communities. She has published numerous research articles on these topics, and she has received funding from The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the American Psychological Association, and the Institute of Education Sciences for her research efforts.

Milton Guardado is a seasoned nonprofit professional with a remarkable 20-year journey in community development. With a passion for creating positive change. He has dedicated his career to empowering communities and fostering growth. Currently, Milton holds the pivotal role of go community coordinator for OST/South Union, where his expertise and commitment continue to drive impactful initiatives that uplift and strengthen the local community.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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Torrina Harris is The Future Is Us Policy Task Force Lead. She is a Galveston resident, mother, writer, and community advocate. Herbackground includes offender education, community organizing, arts advocacy, and cross-sector collaboration. Harris' work centers racial justice, gender equity, accessibility, and disruptions institutional and systemic oppression.

Kennedy Henderson (she/her) is a partner, older sister, friend, and pet parent to her dog Cece. She loves to bake, explore Houston, and watch TV. For work, Kennedy is the Project Manager for the Equity Action Project and a Communications Associate for Full Circle Strategies. In addition to her role with Full Circle Strategies, she is an Academic Advisor and Student Engagement Coordinator for the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work where she graduated with her Master of Social Work degree in May 2022. She is committed to creating and supporting spaces for BIPOC individuals and increasing access to education for BIPOC students. Kennedy participated in the first cohort of the Ukombozi Fellowship which allowed her to practice anti-racist research and create a storytelling project with two other fellows to raise awareness about the cancer cluster in Houston's Fifth Ward neighborhood. After participating in the Ukombozi Fellowship, Kennedy has stayed involved with the RE Collective by serving on the steering committee and participating in events.

Nicholas Holstein, Executive Director of HUG ME Ink is a playwright, director, producer, and screenwriter from San Antonio. He holds a Bachelor's in Sociology from University of Texas at San Antonio and will have his Master in Entertainment Business in October. He uses the arts for people in recovery to express themselves.

Lharissa Jacobs, MBA is the Founder and Executive Director of Fit Houston, a non-profit that promotes free physical activity in communities. As the former Vice President of Health Strategies at the American Heart Association (AHA) in Houston, she worked with clinics and community partners to maximize equitable health and well-being. She has spent the past two decades advocating for healthy communities. Prior to joining the AHA, she pioneered and led a large portfolio of evidence-based programs focused on child nutrition and chronic disease prevention for the YMCA of Greater Houston. Lharissa is a Senior Fellow with the American Leadership Forum and alumna of McKinsey & Company Asian Executive Leadership Program. Lharissa is on the Board of Directors for the UH Health Family Care Center, Houston Tool Bank and The Common Market Texas. She is dedicated to using her professional experience and innovative thinking to support sustainable and stronger communities. She has a master's degree in education and an M.B.A. from the University of Houston and speaks Spanish.

Fatema Jawadi serves as an intern for the AAAA youth resiliency initiative. She is a Middle Eastern Asian and attends Cypress Falls High School. Fatema has interests in photography, listening to music, reading, and learning new languages. She wants to help her peers who have mental health issues and wants to lead conversations in the community about factors that impact their mental health.

Aila Jiang is a sophomore student at St. John's School. She started volunteering when she was 10 years old, and has accumulated more than 400 community service hours. She serves as a community service officer at her school and Chief Philanthropy Officer at AYLUS (Alliance of Youth Leaders in the United States), a student-led volunteering youth organization that has 140+ branches nationwide.Aila attended a youth advocacy internship at the Light & Salt Association at the end of 2022, where she learned skills that helped her host a forum dedicated to educating the AANHPI community about mental health and policy. With the knowledge and inspiration from the internship program, she founded a youth advocacy non-profit organization called Hummingbird Community Outreach, which is headquartered in the Greater Houston Area, with branches in New Jersey and the Greater Dallas Area. She is also on the 2023 planning committee for Youth Voices for Change, which is currently planning a project on mental health awareness.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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Andy Jiang, a sophomore Economics major at Texas A&M University College Station, originates from Greater Houston. In high school, he held the role of Vice President at AYLUS Pearland Branch, a youth-led nonprofit collaborating with the Project Rise and Shine. In summer 2023, Andy interned at the Light and Salt Association, spearheading youth volunteer initiatives and aiding in reporting and process streamlining. With a strong commitment, Andy aims to extend the Hummingbird Community Outreach's vision to university campuses.

Kalyn Joseph is a dedicated professional with a passion for community well-being. As the Community Involvement Coordinator for the City of Houston's Peer Wellness Specialist Program, she has committed herself to making a positive impact on youth and young adults. She embarked on the path of helping youth and young adults at the age of 18 when she completed the Peer Wellness Specialist Training program and became a Peer Wellness Specialist (PWS). She proudly served as a PWS for 7 years. In her role as a PWS, she helped youth in need and mentored her fellow PWS. Kalyn completed her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Texas Southern University in 2021. She ventured into the Houston Independent School District, where she worked as a Wraparound Specialist and proudly received the 2022 Impact Award for her contributions to the community. Now, she has come full circle, returning to the PWS program as a Community Involvement Coordinator. Kalyn's mission is to continue making a difference in the lives of youth a young adults and foster wellness within our community.

Dr. Anila Khan is a Community Behavioral Health Project Manager at the Asian American Health Coalition-HOPE Clinic. She is a trained physician with a Master's in Public Health (MPH) and has expertise in medicine, prevention, and public health. With over 15 years of experience in the field, Dr. Khan understands the significance of promoting health and preventing diseases. Her work revolves around developing and implementing public health policies and programs that cater to the needs of diverse populations. Dr. Khan is committed to reducing health disparities and enhancing community health through education, advocacy, and research. She has worked with various organizations, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions. Dr. Khan's research has been published in numerous peer-reviewed journals, and she has presented at several national and international conferences.

Jason Lau is a project manager overseeing program evaluation, outcomes reporting, and contracts management for DePelchin Children's Center in Houston, Texas. Much of Jason's work focuses on mental and behavioral health programs, evaluating the efficacy of client services. Jason earned his Master of Public Health in management, policy, and community health practice from the University of Texas School of Public Health.

Alexander Lopez currently attends the University of St. Thomas. Alex was part of the original Gulfton Youth Coalition and now serves as a Gulfton Youth Staff Member. He has interests in international and community development.

Michelle Lopez Goodman, MSN,RN hasbeen a nurse for almost 25 years. My early experience as a nurse has been with critical care bedside nursing in which I was trained to care for high acuity medical/surgical patients, cardiovascular patients, and trauma patients. Working in critical care and in a supervisory role at multiple institutions, I realized clinical education is of utmost importance which led me to pursue a higher-level degree in nursing. I have also had the experience of working in the role of house supervisor and a director for both an adult facility as well as a pediatric facility. For roughly 13 years, I was the nursing director for an inpatient oncology/nephrology unit, specialty float nurses, and child life. Most recently, I was promoted to Senior Director of Care Coordination which encompasses social work, case management, behavioral health, child abuse team and child life. This role has been challenging and fulfilling at the same time in that there are so many initiatives that could be implemented to improve the overall care of the patients and families we serve, however, we cannot do it all - yet. For now, our focus is on improving access to mental health services for the population we serve and working collaboratively with other disciplines to screen children for depression, offer services, get them connected and reduce ED admission for mental health patients. I have been married for 19 years to a wonderful man who is a director here at Driscoll Children's Hospital and we have 4 wonderful children ages 23 to 13 years old. For fun, we spend time with our children and our family dog as well as travel. In fact, you can find us most weekends at the baseball fields, sporting events or the beach.

YOUNG MINDS MATTER

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Felicia Martin has over 20 years of experience in serving organizations focused on supporting BIPOC students, specifically as it relates to equity and access to education. She has leveraged her passion for equity by supporting non-profits, districts, and colleges with strategic planning, leadership development, and creating systems that are more conducive to equitable practices. Over the last 8 years, she helped build a Houston-based non-profit organization called EMERGE, which empowers & prepares high-performing students from underserved communities to attend and graduate from selective colleges & universities across the nation. Felicia was responsible for assessing the overall needs of EMERGE's BIPOC, first-generation college students nationally, and working collaboratively with college partners to cultivate support systems that would not only lead to academic persistence, but to overall wellness, inclusion, and belonging. She has an undergraduate degree in Sociology from Rice University and a master's degree in Organizational Development from St. Edward's University in Austin. Felicia develops and implements JED's programs to promote emotional health and prevent suicide among high school and higher ed students throughout Texas.

Fortune McDonald has served as the Center Director for two years at the U.S. Dream Academy Third Ward in Houston, TX. His journey in youth development began as a Youth Minister at his home church, a role in which he is currently still active in. Fortune has also volunteered with several nonprofit organizations as a musician and mentor. He has also developed and implements an interactive and youth-centered program called Empowerment Through Poetry which seeks to improve the social, emotional, and academic well being of middle and high school students. Fortune was drawn to U.S. Dream Academy during a visit to observe one of the learning centers. Being able to see first hand the impact the Houston team had on the students, the freedom and joy the students showed, Fortune just knew he could have a great opportunity to contribute to the overall vision of U.S. Dream Academy.

Verniss McFarland, III (Pronoun: Verniss, She, They) is a gender-nonconforming-trans-identifying person from Houston, Tx, who has been active in the community for more than 17 years, starting as a student volunteer for HISD and HIV resource navigator. Born in the South Park community, Verniss always had a passion for community togetherness, revitalization, volunteerism, and culture, starting in elementary school and evolving as they continued to mature and develop a better understanding of building a sustainable future in the community. In the Spring of 2017, Verniss founded The Mahogany Project (TMP, Inc.) in Houston, TX, sparked after the death of Chyna Gibson, a trans-experienced Black woman who was killed in New Orleans on February 25, 2017. TMP inc. aims to reduce social isolation, stigma, and acts of injustice in TQLGB+ communities of color. Currently, Verniss is working to end stigma aimed at BIPOC folx of TGNCNB experience in Texas through The Mahogany Project, The Mahogany Center (the first Black trans-led and founded physical space in Houston), and Coalition for Trans Liberation, combating anti-transgender policy and working to mobilize the community around various efforts surrounding systematic racism, fair housing, human rights, civic engagement, reproductive justice, advocate and activist for Human Rights, LGBT+ Rights, decimalization of Sex Work, ending stigmatized language, Inclusive Education and working to end voters suppression in Texas and Nevada.

Lisa McKenna is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She attended the University at Buffalo with a concentration in children and youth. Lisa brings 20 plus years of experience, in counseling children, families, and couples (trained in EFT therapy), including people dealing with complex medical needs, domestic violence victims, addictions, grief and loss, and a variety of social and mental health issues. In the course of her experience, he has worked in the school, hospital, community, correctional, and private practice setting. She is a certified family mediator and parent coordinator by the Supreme Court. During November 2021, Lisa joined the Social Work Department at Driscoll Children's Hospital (DCH). In April 2022, Lisa assumed the role of Behavioral Health and Child Life and therapeutic arts Manager. Lisa and her team have implemented a Behavioral and Mental Health Department within Driscoll Children's Hospital and a mental health pilot program at multiple local schools and within DCH.

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Brandie Meister is a dedicated advocate for mental health and community development, with a strong focus on empowering women and young girls. With 8 years of diverse operations and management experience, she has a proven track record of supporting female-focused non-profits and community initiatives. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Brandie's passion for mental health advocacy shines through her role as Vice President of Real Queens Fix Each Other's Crowns, a nonprofit dedicated to enhancing the mental well-being of women and young girls. She is deeply committed to creating positive change within her community. In addition to her community work, Brandie manages her Mindfulness and Wellness business and serves as a trusted Mental Health consultant. She has also authored a self-published poetry book, reflecting her love for writing and creativity.

Ar'Sheill Monsanto has worked in advocacy, public policy and community organizing for 15 years where she has been responsible for implementing evidence-based strategies to create environmental change through public policy. In the past she has spearheaded advocacy campaigns for organizations including the Illinois Dept. of Public Health, American Heart Association, Texans Standing Tall, Texas YMCAs and Leadership for Educational Equity. Ar'Sheill is also the author of Kids in Cuffs: Striving for Equity and Empathy in Education. She wrote this book because she is passionate about creating meaningful change through public policy in the education space. When Ar'Sheill is not working you can find her binging on reality shows, searching for the perfect cupcake, or complaining about exercising.

Crispin Ketelhut Montelione is the Creative Director of Training and Content Development for the VIRTUS Programs, with over 15 years of experience in content development and training for non-profit, child-serving organizations. Crispin is a highly skilled presenter, master trainer, educational program developer and producer of live and e-program content, and she is a script and curriculum writer, and editor for all matters related to child protection and victim advocacy. Her subject matter and demonstrated knowledge is related to: child abuse and safeguarding, abuse prevention for children and vulnerable adults, trauma-informed care, policy development, compliance and risk management. Crispin's formal education includes a bachelor's degree in the Administration of (Criminal) Justice from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA; a Certificate of Business and Spanish from the University of Navarre (Pamplona, Spain); and multiple Spanish certificates from the Global Language Network of George Washington University (Washington, DC) and the International Language Institute (Washington, DC). Crispin is married, lives in Florida with her husband, and is a mother to three children.

Sarah Montgomery (they/them) is a Housing Justice organizer with Gulf Coast Area Labor Federation and Texas Housers currently receiving a MPH in Community Health Practice from UTHealth Houston. Their personal experience growing up housing insecure in the Texas Hill Country sparked their passion to fight for a world where everyone has access to safe, stable, and quality housing they can control. Prior to professional work in this field, they were and remain a volunteer community organizer fighting alongside other tenants and working with unhoused individuals and families, keeping them rooted in the reality of living in poverty and under capitalism here in Houston. They are a communist and abolitionist with dreams of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist liberation!

Erika Ngo currently attends the University of St. Thomas on a full-ride scholarship. She has been working with the Gulfton Community for almost 3 years! She is passionate about empowering other young people like herself and loves to experience new things!

Greg Norwood serves as the Young Invincibles' Engagement Manager in the southern regional office. Previously, he was the Co-Lead 1st grade teacher at Dogan Elementary and Volunteer Coordinator for SBP, a national disaster relief, resilience, and recovery non-profit headquartered in New Orleans, LA. There he led the volunteer engagement and small dollar fundraising efforts to ensure both human and financial capital were always available to aid our community of clients impacted by natural disasters in Texas.

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Naomi Cruz Ojeda is Young Invincibles' mental health policy fellow. She is originally from Jalisco, Mexico, but grew up in San Antonio, Texas. She lives in Austin, where she recently graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. At UT, she majored in Health & Society and Latinx Studies with a minor in Portuguese. Most of her passion points are centered around social justice, racial and educational equity, pathways to self-determination, and prioritization and restorative justice practices. In short [or not], she is committed to helping build a world that recognizes everyone's humanity and operates to serve everyone in it with compassion, love, and real accountability.

Jaison Oliver is an educator and an organizer with the BLMHTX/ImagiNoir Collective, building collaborative spaces in order to imagine and create more equitable communities where Black people can thrive. He also works with local and national organizations to fill multicultural and gender gaps in contemporary art history through Wikipedia edit-a-thons. Jaison blogs at MyHoustonEvents.com and facilitates the Houston Afrofuturism Book Club, which gathers monthly to explore new worlds through Black speculative fiction.

Elizabeth Otto is a second-year Clinical Psychology Ph.D. student at TAMU. She completed her undergraduate at University of Nebraska- Lincoln. Her research interests are broadly in traumatic stress. She is particularly interested in examining how familial and community-based risk and resiliency factors impact trauma outcomes and help-seeking behaviors for trauma-exposed Black populations.

Victoria Ou is a junior at The Academy of Science and Technology in The Woodlands College Park High School. She serves as co-vice president of Academy Student Union, and she also helped start a self-care and mental health club at the school called Care4Self. Additionally, Victoria is also a member of National Chinese Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta and DECA. She has a passion for music, STEM, the environment and Antarctica, and is also a certified Texas Water Specialist. But after starting high school, her eyes have been opened to the importance of mental health. Victoria was a recent participant in the Light and Salt Association's youth internship program, in which she designed and executed a community outreach project regarding social determinants of youth mental health issues. Victoria decided to spread awareness on youth mental health because she sees the need for it in both her personal life and the community.

Ed Pettitt, MPH is the President of the Rotary Club of Houston Skyline. Originally from the Buffalo, New York area, he moved to Houston in 2011. He joined the Peace Corps where he spent time in Botswana. He has a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Cornell University, a Masters in Public Health from the University of Texas School of Public Health, and is currently a PhD student in Urban Planning and Environmental Policy at Texas Southern University. He is the CEO of Wellspring, a company that provides healthcare and hospitality consulting services. He has co-founded Globin Medical, a medical device startup company, as well as the Houston Global Health Collaborative and Global Health innovations and Action Foundation. His special areas of interest are: Urban planning, energy transition, environmental policy, health equity, tactical urbanism, energy transition, global health, healthcare management, urban planning, environmental policy, sharing economy, ethnography, and genomics.

Danielle Porter is a fourth year Clinical Psychology doctoral student at Texas A&M University and a member of the Youth Rising Lab. She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Memphis. Her research interests include examining the intersection of racism and health, ethnic and racial identity formation processes, and development of multisystemic resilience for marginalized youth of color.

Vee Ramos, MSW (they/them) brings compassion, somatics, a trauma-informed-abolitionist-feminist lens, and curiosity into their community work and EDIJ facilitation practice. For the last decade, Vee has worked with non-profits, small businesses, and academia to support the shift in internal cultures and perspectives utilizing Kai Cheng-Thom's Framework, a somatic lens that is intended to support people stay grounded and mindful in interpersonal and systemic conflict. Vee received their Master of Social Work from the University of Houston and has completed certifications in anti-racism facilitation with The Re-Collective, embodied conflict resolution with Kai Cheng-Thom, and Decolonizing the Body through Somatics, with Kelsey Blackwell. Vee is in the process of completing their social work license to be able to provide accessible 1-on-1 therapy sessions for trans, queer, and non-binary folks.

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Jennifer Reed is a professional educator and Licensed Professional Counselor with more than 15 years of experience and expertise in supporting the social, emotional, and mental health of students through strategic systems and program development. Prior to joining JED, Jennifer was the Director of Strategic Education Initiatives at the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. She previously served in Dallas ISD as Director of Clinical Services. Jennifer's multifaceted career has advanced collaboration between schools and strategic partners in identifying solutions to improve service delivery and ensure equity in access to high-quality school-linked mental health care to students and families. Jennifer is a first-generation college graduate and reflects her family's South Texas Latina roots in her hard work, dedication, and passion. She has bachelor's degrees in Human Development and Family Sciences, and Philosophy from The University of Texas at Austin, and a master's degree in Counseling from The University of North Texas.

Destiny Richardson brings eight years of service to the Houston Health Department as a Peer Wellness Specialist. Her lived experiences and willingness to share her story has touched the lives of individuals in and beyond Houston. Destiny's commitment to social justice extends beyond her role as a PWS. For 6 years, she served on the Board of Directors of Disability Rights Texas PAIMI Advisory Council. Currently pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work at Texas Southern University, Destiny continues to lead as the President of TSU's Association of Black Social Workers.

MyKayla Searles works with the U.S. Dream Academy and OST/South Union in Houston, TX.

Dr. Aisha Siddiqui is the Founder and Executive Director of Culture of Health – Advancing Together, a non-profit organization focused on improving the health and well-being of immigrant and refugee communities in Houston. Through education, arts, advocacy, and access to care, CHAT provides support services for underserved communities with the goal of creating a self-sufficient and healthy community. Dr. Siddiqui, who holds a doctorate in Management, Policy, and Community Health from the University of Texas, School of Public Health, uses art to connect and engage with these communities.

Maggie Stern (she/her) is the Program and Policy Manager for Youth Engagement at the Children's Defense Fund of Texas, where she has led statewide advocacy against curriculum censorship and book bans at the Texas Legislature and Texas State Board of Education, co-led the state high school voter registration campaign, and published research on youth civic engagement and empowerment. With her team, she developed the CDF-Texas YOUthTX advocacy program that has trained hundreds of young Texans to use their experiences to take collective action and shape policy to meet the needs of a rising generation of advocates. Prior to her time at CDF, Maggie worked with children and youth from preschool to college as a childcare worker, mentor, and teaching assistant. She has a deep respect for the experiences, skills, and vision of young people, and a commitment to working alongside young people to build the world they want to grow up in. Maggie grew up in Portland, OR and graduated from Boston College and the University of Texas at Austin. She lives with her partner in Austin, where she spends her free time volunteering at the library, hiking and biking the greenbelts, and trying new taco spots.

Samuel Tay is currently a senior at The Woodlands High School. As someone who has personally witnessed the effects of depression on his own friends, he knows the importance of making change and providing support for youth. He joined Youth Voices for Change in the summer of 2023 in hopes of finding a program where he could help improve the mental health of kids throughout our school systems. He is also part of a newly started organization named The Lily Flower Initiative, where he hopes to create a safe and loving environment for youth where mental illness isn't stigmatized, as well as provide free therapy and resources to impoverished youth. His goal is to continue making youth voices heard, something he hopes to advocate for in college as well.

Tania Terezon is the community outreach and engagement specialist for NRCDC with a passion for creating healthy and active communities. She holds a bachelor's degree in nutrition and recently earned a Master of Public Health from NYU. Her expertise lies in promoting healthy lifestyles and empowering communities to make positive changes in a collective way.

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Chris Thomas brings the same drive for excellence that earned him outstanding sales awards to The Defensive Line. His thirst for learning about the mental health field is fed by numerous podcasts and webinars on a daily basis. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, as well as Touched By Suicide (TBS) board member, AFSP Project 2025 board member, and College of Wooster Ad Hoc Alumni Trustee. Martha, Chris, and Solomon were recipients of the 2019 AFSP Lifesaver Award.

Martha Thomas exudes warmth and welcome to everyone she meets. Her 30-plus years as an educator have proven invaluable to The Defensive Line where she serves as Chief Education Officer. Her insight of the realities of the classroom provides an understanding of what teachers are faced with everyday.She has led programming partnerships in Dallas ISD, Fort Worth ISD, Clark County SD, Baylor University and Stanford University. Speaking engagements include Mental Health America/GD, Neuroscience Education Institute Congress, and United Healthcare Town Hall.

Lydia Tong, a senior at Bellaire High School in Houston, TX, has spent her high school career chasing her passion for mental health and neuroscience. As a Light and Salt Association intern, Lydia launched a mental health campaign, targeting the disadvantages of the Asian American community with short-form posts and presentations at schools, senior centers, and organizations. Inspired by the people she met during her campaign, Lydia began researching the physiological reasons for mental illness. At the Buchanan Lab at the University of Iowa, she investigated the effect of corticosterone and 5-HT2C serotonin receptors on seizure suppression and mortality in amygdala kindled mice and its impact on epilepsy, helping pilot experiments for future projects at the forefront of epilepsy research. During the pandemic, Lydia conducted a research project on the stress response to COVID-19 in eating disorders and mental health, discovering the pandemic severely increased stress in young adults and led to instances of eating disorder-related behaviors. Currently at the Baylor College of Medicine with the Xu Lab, Lydia continues researching mental health and eating behaviors/disorders. Lydia's goal in pursuing research on the brain in relation to mental health is to provide more efficient and viable treatment to mental illness.

Bre'Ana Treadwell, a 2023 graduate from Jones Futures Academy, is a rising star in the field of wellness and mentorship. During her time at Jones Futures Academy, she benefited from the Peer Wellness Specialist program as a mentee. Breanna demonstrated her passion for helping others while gaining insight on her own personal growth. Breanna recognized her dedication to others thus accepting an exciting opportunity to join the PWS program as a mentor. With a bright future ahead, she is committed to making a positive impact and inspiring others on their wellness journeys.

Carmen Valdez, PhD is an associate professor at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work. She has a joint appointment as associate professor in the Department of Population Health, Dell Medical School, where she is chief of the Division of Community Engagement and Health Equity. She is faculty director of the Community-Driven Initiatives Program, which supports local residents to tackle issues affecting health in their community. She has co-led community and academic coalitions that leverage social capital, community experience, and university research and resources to address health equity for minoritized and marginalized populations. She develops community engagement tools to support community-academic partnerships and community engagement and self-determination. Valdez has a special research interest in understanding family stability and stress in the context of social policy. In her family research, she examines the role of immigration and health policy, neighborhood, and family factors on immigrant personal and family health, as well as developing community-based, family-focused interventions for Latino immigrant families.

Lennisha Walker, MPH, a native of Saint Paul, Minnesota, is an experienced youth development professional with 15 years' experience addressing youth mental health, social determinants of health and community safety. Lennisha has served her community as a dedicated youth worker, volunteer, and mentor to underserved youth. A Houston Texas transplant, Lennisha's expertise extends to local government program management for youth and adolescents. Lennisha serves as Managing Director of Community Safety for City Year, Inc., provides Youth Development consultation to Houston Health Department, and is the owner of Harper Hague Consulting. Lennisha's passion work is providing safe and affirming space for young people to thrive.

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Dr. Tony Walker joined The Jed Foundation in November 2022 as Senior Vice President of Academic Programs. In his role, he structures, expands, and leads JED's high school and higher education programs to meet the organization's strategic plan objectives. To fulfill this work, he connects strategy, people management, operations, fiscal responsibility, partnerships, and school recruitment functions. Prior to joining JED, Tony served as Vice President of Education Strategy and Innovation at the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. He previously worked in multiple roles in public education, including as a teacher, school counselor, and most recently as an executive district leader over Student Support Services at Uplift Education. Tony is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Certified School Counselor, and holds a Bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Missouri, a Master's degree in Counseling, and PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision from Texas Tech University.

Jonathan Warren is a former attorney and school liaison and is a Communities of Care Co-Coordinator for The Future is US (TFIU). He is passionate about achieving equality and equity for underrepresented students. As a coordinator, Jonathan is tasked with growing TFIU and building its capacity. Additionally, he has the goal of political organization and education around the school disciplinary issue. Through work with collaborative partners, he hopes to change and implement policies and practices that will reduce classroom inequities. Ultimately, he hopes to continually build and coalesce with like-minded individuals in and around Galveston.

Clarissa Webb is the Community Engagement Manager for the Texas office of the Children's Defense Fund. A native Houstonian, she was originally hired to run the now-retired CDF Beat the Odds Scholarship Program, and the young people with whom she connected through Beat the Odds sparked her passion for amplifying the vital voices of young Texans. This mother of two fell in love with the CDF Freedom Schools Program when she attended Freedom Schools National Training in 2018, and she never misses an opportunity to talk about and participate in this program. She credits the people and conversations she's had at CDF as helping her discover her why, which is to advance equity everywhere she goes.

Kiounis and Sydney Williams are a married couple that resides in Austin. Sydney is the Youth Director and Kiounis is the Young Adult President for Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

La'Quana Williams MPH, is a Program Manager at Prevention Institute's Los Angeles office whose work focuses on the intersection of health equity and racial justice. La'Quana works across numerous projects and focus areas including external efforts across PI's Healthy and Equitable Communities, and Safety and Wellbeing teams. She supports consultation intakes and delivery of training and technical assistance across a range of tools, specifically the System of Prevention framework and Building Bridges paper and presentation materials. Internally, La'Quana leads PI's capacity building processes for a racial justice approach to staff development. In her current role, much of her work supports local health departments and other federal agencies in their learning and implementation of applying a racial justice lens to their violence prevention both locally and nationally. La'Quana received her master's of Public Health with an emphasis in Urban Health Disparities from Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, and a BA in Africana Studies from San Diego State University.

Roxy D. Hall Williamson is a native Texan born on Galveston Island. Her activism began as an undergraduate at Savannah State University in the late 1980s where she organized around campus issues, served as a peer counselor, marched to free Nelson Mandela from an epically long incarceration and fought to end the scourge of Apartheid in South Africa. In 2007, Roxy began volunteering with local organizations providing meals to county residents, transporting elderly members of her congregation to church and assisting the local government volunteering at polling places through various organizational opportunities. Always open to learning, her summer travel to Bermuda offered yet more avenues to participate in community engagement and educational events focused on local issues and policy implementation.

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Yvanna (she/they) is a passionate co-lead over the youth homeless development program, and the Power House program that mentors children currently within the child welfare system. They are a Houston born native with a passion for education, children's liberation, and community building. Yvanna first started organizing at 19 and considers herself to be a communist/Pan Africanist and a lifelong student on the study of Black, queer, and childrens liberation. Her continuous work alongside unhoused individuals and families has not only sharpened her politics, but has also allowed her to grasp a realistic understanding of how being poor under a capitalist state is punishable by separation, isolation, and death.

Maisaa Zaza is the Founder and CEO of The Future Beyond Charity and has a passion for helping others and has dedicated their career to this mission. Starting out in nursing and hospital management, they eventually transitioned into charity management to have a more direct impact on people's lives. They value learning from others and working on themselves to improve, and their main objective is to assist those facing challenges and help them achieve their goals. In 2018, they established The Future Beyond Charity, a non-profit organization that supports refugees, immigrants, and low-income individuals in the Houston area. With a professional team and various programs, they work hard to help community members achieve their goals and celebrate their success stories. In their free time, they enjoy reading, listening to music, meditating, and spending time at the beach. They have a strong preference for coffee and strive to maintain a healthy diet.



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