

# Using Youth Voices

A newsletter based on a Cornell Cooperative Extension Administration Innovation Grant,  
*Using Youth Voices to Transform New York State 4-H into a Nationally Recognized Antiracist*

March 2022

## Introducing our guest columnist

This edition of **Using Youth Voices** features Gaby, as our guest columnist for *In Their Own Words*.

Gabriella "Gaby" Vera, LMSW was introduced to 4-H by Michele Luc, CUCE New York City. As Michele explains, "Gaby was one of my amazing CITY (Communities Improved Through Youth) Project youth. While participating in CITY Project, Gaby and some of her friends decided to start a 4-H club at their school in Queens. When CITY Project ended, Gaby joined the ACT for Youth Network that I ran."

We are extremely grateful to Gaby for sharing her experiences and thoughtful suggestions for making NYS 4-H more welcoming and inclusive for youth of color.

Do you know a 4-H'er or a 4-H alum with ideas about what NYS 4-H needs to do to transform 4-H into a welcoming, nurturing and nationally respected antiracist organization? We're looking for guest columnists to share what they believe needs to be done to improve 4-H.

Please let one of the **Using Youth Voices** project team know if you want to recommend a young person as our next *In Their Own Words* columnist! See the project team's contact information here.

### Using Youth Voices Project Team

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## In Their Own Words

Gaby, Guest Columnist



I joined 4-H as a shy teen who knew she wanted to help people but didn't have the confidence or know how to do so. 4-H changed a lot of this for me. It provided me opportunities, broadened my perspective, taught me to make my voice heard and helped me discover my passion for advocacy which ultimately led to my career as a social worker.

While I'll always look back at my time with 4-H with joy, I can't say that 4-H was perfect. One of the biggest failures was a lack of inclusivity.

While the NYC 4-H community included youth and leaders of various races, ethnicities, religions, cultures and more, not only was this not reflected statewide in 4-H, but there were times that even I as a white person felt uncomfortable in some 4-H spaces.

One incident that I remember most vividly was when I was chaperoning the NYC 4-H youth at the State Teen Action Representatives Retreat (STARR). Our group was the only one with youth of color in it, which sadly, seemed to be the norm at statewide 4-H events I attended.

Between activities at STARR, I was approached excitedly by an adult from another county's 4-H club applauding how "well spoken" and "polite" the NYC 4-H youth were. While the words were meant as a compliment, this overzealous praise left me feeling extremely uneasy. I adored the NYC 4-H youth but their behavior reflected that of most teenagers in 4-H so these comments felt less complimentary and more like thinly veiled racism based on the fact that my group was almost entirely composed of youth of color.

If as a white person, I am able to reflect on my time with 4-H and feel discomfort at the racism, I can only imagine how bad this must have been for the youth of color and how many may have been deterred from 4-H because of this discomfort.

If 4-H wants to become a more inclusive and welcoming space to youth of color, I feel that real change needs to happen at all levels. 4-H needs to hire more black and brown leaders and then listen and learn from them. 4-H needs to use its power and reach to raise awareness, educate, and advocate for youth of color in issues affecting them. 4-H needs to do direct outreach to communities of color. 4-H needs to make inclusivity a core value that it teaches youth. Most importantly, 4-H and every person who is a part of the 4-H community needs to self-reflect and take accountability for the ways they have harmed or acted complacently and done harm to youth of color.

I will start with myself by admitting that in that the conversation I had at STARR made me uneasy, and instead of using my privilege and power to explain to the person why their comments were harmful, I chose to save face and thank the person for their comments about the NYS 4-H'ers being "well spoken" and "polite," a decision I apologize to all youth of color for making.

## Resources, research & more!

### Revisiting Overworked Superheroes



Check out this blog by Sharon Colvin, University of Maryland, College Park, The new pandemic world has made the ideas about youth workers even more important. As people seek more work/life balance, support for mental health and overall quality of life, society is turning to youth workers to work even harder.

But Colvin says, youth workers are *not* superheroes, they need rest, support and training. Youth workers are *not* saviors, they are not working in afterschool to “save” or “fix” youth. Check out this compelling view of youth workers today:

<https://medium.com/changing-the-odds/revisiting-overworked-superheroes-50d69b361dad>

### It Takes an Ecosystem: Understanding the People, Places, and Possibilities of Learning and Development Across Settings

Recent research and initiatives make a strong case for what developmentalists have argued for decades: A young person’s learning and development is shaped in positive and negative ways by the interactions they have with all the adults in their life.

Now is the time to reshape our systems to support this scientific understanding. The chapters in this book provide ideas, tools, examples, and visions for a more connected, more equitable world for young people and the adults in their lives. <https://www.infoagepub.com/products/It-Takes-an-Ecosystem>

### 2022 PRYDE Youth Development Research Update



**PRYDE**  
Program for Research  
on Youth Development  
and Engagement

Save-the-date for the **2022 PRYDE Youth Development Research Update** June 1 and 2. This virtual conference is organized around “*The Ecology of Youth Learning*”

The conference will address: What are the current challenges that youth face in educational settings? How can we create enabling spaces for youth to pursue their passions and to take ownership of their education? What do we know about how young people understand “learning” that can inform programming on these subjects?

For more information, please contact Esther Kim: [sk2274@cornell.edu](mailto:sk2274@cornell.edu)  
[https://www.nys4-hstaff.org/post/save-the-date-pryde-youth-development-research-update?utm\\_campaign=7f8f124a-8db6-49db-8b0d-3a57ce09b7a5&utm\\_source=so&utm\\_medium=mail&cid=ee4ea619-bd8d-45fa-a7dd-57223398441b](https://www.nys4-hstaff.org/post/save-the-date-pryde-youth-development-research-update?utm_campaign=7f8f124a-8db6-49db-8b0d-3a57ce09b7a5&utm_source=so&utm_medium=mail&cid=ee4ea619-bd8d-45fa-a7dd-57223398441b)



### About Using Youth Voices

The objective of the *Using Youth Voices* project is to create a series of mechanisms to give youth a vehicle for sharing their ideas for transforming NYS 4-H into an antiracist organization.

These are the mechanisms being used:

**In Their Own Words:** Youth will be invited to be guest columnists in e-newsletters to share their ideas.

**Where Are They Now?:** interviews with 4-H alumni will be conducted to give these young people an opportunity to reflect on what helped them most to be successful in 4-H and what recommendations they have for transforming 4-H into an inclusive organization for all youth.

**Youth Voice:** A series of interviews with 4-H alumni, current 4-H'ers and community members to share what they believe is needed to transform 4-H into a respected antiracist organization. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn7VCZ7RTFU&list=PLHdUOnX9VtkU-DhbPYLAUNun8zCIX6cc5>

All suggestions will be culled from these efforts to identify how to create a transformative antiracist NYS 4-H organization.

### Using Youth Voices Project Advisory Committee

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