

# 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 Organization*

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## We're looking for guest columnists!

Do you know a 4-H'er, a 4-H alum or another young person with ideas about what NYS 4-H needs to do and the changes that need to be made to transform 4-H into a welcoming, nurturing and nationally respected antiracist organization?

This edition of *Using Youth Voices* introduces, "In Their Own Words," where young people are invited to be guest columnists and share what they believe needs to be done to improve 4-H.

This month's guest columnist is Asia Ambler. Asia joined the Community Improvement Through Youth (CITY) Project, when she was 14, struggling to fit in and feel accepted in high school. CITY Project was conducted by a team of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Broome County 4-H educators.

Today, Asia is a valued educator for CCE Broome, serving as the 4-H UNITY (Urban Neighborhoods Improved Through Youth) project coordinator, working with youth people, trying to find their way. It's a full-circle moment for Asia!

If you have a suggestion for an "In Their Own Words" guest columnist, please let one of the *Using Youth Voices* project team members know! See project team contact information below.

### *Using Youth Voices Project Team*

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## In Their Own Words

*Asia Ambler, Guest Columnist*



I was introduced to positive youth development (PYD) through the CITY (Community Improvement Through Youth) Project when I was 14 and it helped me discover a passion for youth development and community work.

CITY Project gave me the opportunities and supports I needed to build my self-confidence and public speaking skills and led to conducting a workshop for a standing-room only group of Extension educators at the national CYFAR Conference in San Antonio when I was 15. I often point to this moment as the start of understanding the power of youth voice!

At just 15, I found myself facilitating presentations, planning and carrying out projects and networking with community members. Eventually, these experiences led to my current position with CCE Broome County, where I am a 4-H educator working on a grant similar to CITY!

One of the greatest things CITY Project did was to give me an opportunity to work with caring adults who were super-relatable and often shared their own experiences with many of the youth. While race and other aspects of one's identities do not guarantee relatability, being from the same communities that are being served is an asset that no level of education can instill in a person—it holds intrinsic value for the individual and the youth!

Being a young black girl, I was aware that as much as I was endeared to my educators, they didn't look like me, and as I began to travel and witness how little racial diversity existed across the state in 4-H I was taken aback. Growing up in a predominantly white area, I believed the myth that there just were not as many people of color looking to work in this field.

The caring and resourcefulness of my educators, their mentorship and the genuine relationships that I have with these same educators today supported me in going on to college, becoming a parent and coping with life's unforeseen obstacles.

Today, I find myself as a peer to the same amazing educators who helped keep me grounded while pushing me to the stars! Today, I can utilize and apply PYD in all my CCE work. I feel empowered and love working in youth development. I can honestly say that my time in CITY Project was one of the greatest influences in my life and career!

Through my participation in CCE trainings and having had the experience of being involved in one of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion cohorts, I gained an understanding about the necessity of intentionally engaging with others—with people who don't look like me. To improve NYS 4-H, I would suggest that it's time to examine 4-H hiring—and mentoring—practices to ensure potential 4-H educator candidates are diverse in every way; to tap into populations well-equipped to work with youth of color and then seek out, train and mentor other people of color to be credible messengers with their own diverse experiences.

## Check this out!

### INTERSECTION OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT



Recently, **Asia Ambler** and **Jamila Walida Simon**, NYS 4-H, were invited by the Forum for Youth Investment to participate in the *Making the Invisible Visible: The Intersection of Anti-Black Racism and Adolescent Development and the Role of Community-Based Settings*. The discussion was led by Karen Pittman, founder of the Forum.

*The Intersection of Anti-Black Racism and Adolescent Development*, a newly released report from the National Scientific Council on Adolescence, explores research on how racism impacts adolescent development and the power of social contexts to support positive development in the face of such challenges.

The discussion focused on the role youth-serving organizations can play in optimizing learning and development and countering inequities to ensure thriving for Black adolescents.

Listen to Asia and Jamila share their thoughts about the role of NYS 4-H in positive youth development at: [https://forumfyi.org/post\\_trp/the-intersection-of-anti-black-racism-and-adolescent-development/](https://forumfyi.org/post_trp/the-intersection-of-anti-black-racism-and-adolescent-development/)

### YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACTIVISM IN EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS



Recent events in the news such as multiple mass shootings and police violence led to youth participation in the March for Our Lives and the Black Lives Matter movement, calling for greater awareness and policy changes. Also, the growing degradation of the environment and climate change has inspired youth led action. Research and experience tell us that involving young people in civic engagement and activism activities brings benefits to youth participants. The purpose of this paper from the How Kids Learn Foundation <http://www.howkidslearn.org> is to inform and encourage expanded learning programs to offer youth opportunities to be civically engaged.

[http://www.temescalassociates.com/uploads/1/1/0/6/110631901/promoting\\_civic\\_engagement\\_3.pdf](http://www.temescalassociates.com/uploads/1/1/0/6/110631901/promoting_civic_engagement_3.pdf)

### HUMANITY, HEALING AND DOING THE WORK: *Honoring our collective humanity will result in an education system in which all children thrive*



Dena Simmons, Ed.D., founded LiberatED, a collective at the intersection of racial justice, social emotional learning (SEL) and healing in education rooted in radical love. Simmons has expertise in anti-racist education, emotional intelligence, social justice, teacher education and curriculum development. Identified as one of a new generation of activists for social change, she is the author of an upcoming book, *White Rules for Black People*. This piece from Learning for Justice Magazine is based on a conversation with her. Check it out!

[https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2021/humanity-healing-and-doing-the-work?utm\\_source=learning+for+justice&utm\\_campaign=59d86e1f57-newsletter+9-14-2021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_a8cea027c3-59d86e1f57-82956067](https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2021/humanity-healing-and-doing-the-work?utm_source=learning+for+justice&utm_campaign=59d86e1f57-newsletter+9-14-2021&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a8cea027c3-59d86e1f57-82956067)



### 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.

- **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 podcasts featuring interviews with 4-H alumni, current 4-H'ers and community members to share what they believe is needed to happen to transform 4-H into a respected antiracist organization.

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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