

YouthACT Team Profile



YouthACT SoCal P.O.S.S.E.

Youth: Fernando Olivarez and Branley Acevedo

Adult Partner: Nicole Drazin

Supporting Organization Contact: Lynnae Pattison

Supporting Organization: Colton-Redlands-Yucaipa Regional Occupational Program (CRY-ROP)

Introductions

Youth

My name is Fernando Olivarez IV, and I am twenty years old. I was born and raised in the city of San Bernardino, California. I had trouble with my learning disability in both my education and my social life. When I was younger, I was made fun of because I learn in a different way than other people. Trying to learn and complete school assignments while other students knew I was different from them was a complex situation! In high school, I applied for a program specifically for students with learning disabilities on campus; it helped students gain working experiences for pay. This program really made an impact on me; I felt other students should receive these types of opportunities and take them seriously.

I started to do presentations to the high schools around my community about the opportunities that program offered. It was a blessing and privilege to present, as well as to be recognized by my supporting organization, which awarded me "Volunteer of the Year" for my volunteer work. I received an email about applying to YouthACT, and I was so interested in the program that I met with my adult partner to say, "We need to do this." It was a long process writing up that application, but I am so glad we got selected as a team!

My short-term goal is to work in the juvenile hall (detention center) by offering workshops on how to get employed and the available resources for youth in the community, from health services to schooling and G.E.D. certification. I want to present about anything that will help them pursue an education. My long-term goal is to have my own building to provide a variety of services that will encourage youth and have it be a place where youth feel comfortable to be themselves and thrive to help their future. Right now, I am working two jobs and am a student at San Bernardino Valley College with a major in Human Services.

My name is Branley Acevedo. I am 21 years old. I am a Hispanic college student who lives in San Bernardino, California. One of my strengths is that I am outgoing. I can go somewhere and network with people that I know that can help me and other people. This was something I never had when I was younger, when I was bullied at school. Over the years, I turned that pain into success. Another strength I have is that anything negative someone says to me, I take as a challenge to prove them wrong and show that I can do way more than what they think I can.

I got involved with YouthACT so that I can help students and youth get that voice when they don't have one. I want to help everyone because no one was there to give me a hand in my struggle. A

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short-term goal for me is to get everyone in my school to understand that everyone learns in a different way and that is okay. I also want to stop all the bad things people say about people with disabilities. A long-term goal of mine is to become a grant writer and have a program that helps kids and parents learn about disabilities and share with others that everyone learns differently. I would also like to write grants that help youth find employment.

Thanks to YouthACT, I am in my second year of college and passing all my classes. YouthACT taught me how to speak up when I need help and more time to complete my work. YouthACT showed me how to help more people that I could ever imagine; I even opened a club that helps students with disabilities at my college.

Adult Partner

My name is Nicole Drazin, and I grew up in Colorado Springs, CO but currently reside and work in the “jewel” of Southern California’s Inland Empire, Redlands. After college, I went to work as a fundraiser for a local nonprofit that works with transitional aged homeless youth, then worked in a Transitional Partnership Project high school classroom as an aide, and then served in the implementation of a federally-funded demonstration grant out of the Department of Labor, serving disconnected transitional aged youth. Today, I’m the adult partner for the YouthACT SoCal P.O.S.S.E. and an employment placement specialist for a WIOA youth employment program offered at CRY-ROP.

Now that I stand on the other side of a youth-adult co-creative collaboration, I realize how easy it is to try and “drive their truck” or get in the way of their movement with my own agenda. Despite my own history on youth leadership teams, it has become routine for me to facilitate meetings and lead events. Stepping aside and allowing the drive and power of the P.O.S.S.E.’s voice to break through my norm has both humbled and taught me.

My short-term goals are to better develop the youth voice in my supporting organization. My long-term goals are to become a licensed counselor that will work with youth to help them find their voices and tell their stories. I am a better workforce development professional, a better youth development strategist, and a better person as a result of my partnership with the YouthACT SoCal P.O.S.S.E. I will always be grateful for the opportunity YouthACT, NCWD/Youth, and ODEP gave me.

Supporting Organization Contact

My name is Lynnae Pattison. As Coordinator for Employment Programs at Colton-Redlands-Yucaipa ROP, I am always looking for new opportunities to bring leadership and advocacy to the young adults in our programs. Each year, my team and I have the privilege of recruiting new participants for the WIOA program. Many of the youth we work with have disabilities, some diagnosed and some not, some mild and some significant. Over the past ten years, I have worked with countless young adults who want to achieve their goals but may not know how to take the first step. Some get started training for their chosen career path but quickly become discouraged by setbacks. Coaching these young people is my passion, the work I love to do. I feel that young adults are often undervalued and overlooked. They need adult mentors and programs that support their development, so I was especially excited when one of my staff and two participants asked if

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we could apply for this program called YouthACT that was all about leadership, advocacy, and elevating the conversations between adult partners and youth.

SoCal P.O.S.S.E., CRY-ROP's YouthACT Team, has partnered with our high school campuses, local community colleges, and health care agencies as well as CRY-ROP's instructional team to raise awareness about disabilities and how to interact with students to enhance self-advocacy and success. CRY-ROP supports my plan to sustain and support the campaigns (and energy) that our YouthACT Team has developed and put into practice in our communities. I have already started researching funding streams to continue the team's work here at CRY-ROP following YouthACT.

Supporting Organization

At Colton-Redlands-Yucaipa Regional Occupational Program (CRY-ROP), our mission statement is training students to be career ready, technically skilled, and academically prepared by providing quality Career Technical Education. We provide quality, hands-on career training programs to assist high school students and adults in acquiring marketable job skills. CRY-ROP's program curriculums are validated by local business advisory committees, reflecting current industry standards, and are approved by the ROP's Governing Board. CRY-ROP works in collaboration with K-12 school districts, adult education, community colleges, and workforce development. This collective approach ensures coordinated integration of academic and career preparation competencies connected to sequences, paths, and postsecondary options leading to viable jobs. Secondary students and adults can explore career options and apply academic skills to practical problems, enabling them to prepare for workplace or postsecondary training transition.

CRY-ROP provides employment programs for disconnected and transitional aged youth to support career development with individualized career mentoring and life coaching, work-based learning activities, leadership development, work experience, and supportive services. Leadership by our YouthACT Team in our program activities and events brings a greater sense of youth community, empowerment, and agency to all the young people in attendance. Many of the young adults that participate in our youth employment programs have a disability or face other obstacles that can inhibit successful transition into employment and post-secondary education. The experience working with transitional-age youth led us to consider better and more effective ways to help young adults develop the self-advocacy skills needed to succeed in life. We were also looking for ways to promote the sharing of ideas, strategies, and tools for success among program participants to foster confidence and self-esteem. We were especially interested in the vision of youth-led leadership, planning, and collaboration that YouthACT promotes locally and across the nation.

CRY-ROP's short-term goals are to find more ways to include youth voice in our hiring processes and event planning. We are working to contribute to the County mission of creating a strong "Cradle to Career" pipeline by providing Career Readiness Specialists to our local middle schools – a provision once limited to high schools. Our long-term goal is to be the most influential and well-respected Career Technical Education program in our state—a goal we are well on our way to achieving, with support from our Superintendent! This strong participation in our community allows our organization to help shape and be shaped by the services and needs of the youth of our County.

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Activities

One of our favorite activities has been presenting the Disability History Timeline, which we learned about through the YouthACT training, to students in colleges and high schools. It is a pleasure to show our disability history to the students because no one really hears or learns about the disability rights movement. For YouthACT SoCal P.O.S.S.E., it is an honor for us because our people fought for so much. We have been placed in asylums and discriminated against, held protests, and led movements and because of that, we, as a country, have changed so much. We are also blessed with the services we have now, which came from so many of our people sacrificing and fighting. We are pleased that we can show youth how our society and country has changed and grown. We encourage the students that they can do something for our own local people with disabilities and be part of our history. You can learn more about the Disability History Timeline at <http://www.nclid-youth.info/index.php?id=61>.

Another favorite activity is Career Day, which is when around 300 students come from different high schools all around our community in San Bernardino County. The students take a field trip to our offices to connect with employers and interact with different professionals, from police officers and firefighters to retail managers. The P.O.S.S.E. introduced ourselves when all the students got here; we played some games and shared why this day helps students find out what they are interested in and improve their futures. We also had our own booth where students could learn about YouthACT and what we are working on.

Another activity is revitalizing a club called Successful Inclusion Throughout Advocacy (SITA) for students with disabilities on our local community college campus. SITA is working to educate staff as well as students with disabilities about the resources on campus for them. Branley is serving as club president.

Peer Network

We always hold our meetings in our supporting organization's building. In our meeting, we usually have 3-4 youth. Most are 17-22 year olds from San Bernardino County, CA. It is challenging to meet with our whole peer network at a time that works for everyone because of our different schedules, so we try to get them involved in other ways. There are some youth that come and go. When our supporting organization hosts workshops, one of us often volunteers as a peer leader and invites other peer leaders to join us. We talk to the participants about YouthACT and invite them to our meeting. Our team wants to develop a plan for stronger presentations and encourage stronger peer participation in the future. We hope to reach out to other community organizations to expand our peer network.

Tips

When developing a peer network and thinking about youth voice, we recommend thinking about the space and setup when having youth or peer network meetings. We've changed a lot in the way we do our meetings. At the beginning, Nicole, our adult partner, would be in the front of our meetings, just like in school where we would be in front of the teacher and wait for directions. Nicole realized we would tend to look at her for the answer, so she started sitting beside us instead of at the front of the room. This shifted the way we did our meetings because we noticed

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our conversations went from depending on Nicole to using our own voices and directing the meetings. Nicole became the note taker, which meant we as youth had to be more engaged, as Nicole had to talk less because she was writing the minutes.

When developing a peer network, Fernando says, “Being solid advocates helps us relate as we see challenges and different perspectives that come from diversity.” Sharing experiences and diversity helps all involved learn how to build better communication, personal confidence, and a stronger mission statement.

TIPS FOR YOUTH AND ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

For youth and adults to work together as partners, we recommend that both adults and youth let their stigma go. We know as youth that talking or even starting a conversation with an adult is hard and intimidating, but our elders have so much to offer. We youth should seek answers to our questions from different adults. This creates a pattern and sooner or later we won't feel intimidated when approaching adults. Adults need to not assume all youth are the same because we are not; therefore keep in mind what makes us unique, especially when a youth acts out or misbehaves. Most of the time, adults try to correct situations without knowing all the facts, so we recommend adults build relationships with their students, which will help youth when they feel like misbehaving. Adults should try to figure out why youth feel like this before disciplining them.

When we needed help or advice, we found that our supporting organization was a place to get all types of help, from how to be professional in the workplace to support with life situations. What we recommended to youth seeking any type of help is to find another youth that has gone through the service you're interested in and ask if they like or enjoy having this service.

Reflections

Opportunities like YouthACT are important because they give us a voice as youth who have disabilities, even when some of us have trouble speaking or can't speak at all. There are opportunities to be in a team and have the chance to have your voice heard. YouthACT is important because it helps youth find their voices and figure out how to make their lives easier. It helps youth understand and not be ashamed of their disabilities and realize that they can better their lives.

YouthACT and opportunities like it build bridges between well-meaning adults and silent youth. Too often, we run into systems designed FOR youth that have not had the benefit of being shaped BY youth. YouthACT provides ways for youth to be present at every decision that is made on their behalf, which enriches the services and experience for the youth involved and those benefiting from their service. We continue to learn to work with one another by building our partnerships with each other and our community.

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Youth team members Branley and Fernando have learned so much from participating in YouthACT, including using their advocacy skills and techniques from the YouthACT training. The guidelines and publications from NCWD/Youth helped spread the team's mission statement. Branley says, "I've learned about my potential and ability to reach others in different communities because of YouthACT by preparing and giving conference presentations and meeting with other community groups to expand their peer networks and outreach." Adult Partner Nicole has learned how to be supportive of youth and help them foster their leadership, confidence, and voice by letting them lead and providing support when needed.

Looking Forward

The YouthACT SoCal P.O.S.S.E. will continue to promote youth voices by motivating and educating students on the Disability History Timeline, while also sharing the opportunities that are available now because of what our people did in the past. This will help give students the idea that we do have a voice, and we have our movement that is still in progress. We will attend workshops, conferences, and club meetings. This will help us develop our leadership skills plus we will network with other leaders from around our community. We all hope to continue to work in the human services and youth development fields by teaching self-advocacy wherever we go.

Fernando will assist with the planning of a county-wide youth conference by serving as an active member of the Youth Advisory Board for that event. He will continue to push forward with teaching the disability timeline to high school students as well as exposing them to available transition/life resources. He hopes to eventually partner with the juvenile detention centers in our county by providing employability and transition workshops to the youth there. He also actively participates in the Operation MONEY Leadership Council that plans and promotes social events for the employment program youth participants. He consistently educates the youth and adults around him in his daily life.

Branley will continue practicing leadership by serving as the SITA club president on his college campus. He hopes to eventually partner with surrounding community colleges to create similar clubs so that students at other campuses can benefit from the new ground gained by SITA. He also actively serves on the Operation MONEY Leadership Council, and continues to educate the youth and adults around him in his day to day life. Branley is passionately pursuing a certificate in Human Services, after which he plans to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Public Administration, and a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Nicole will continue practicing partnerships with youth leaders by assisting with the P.O.S.S.E.'s goals even after YouthACT. She will act as a resource for the Leadership Council and seize every opportunity to teach at staff in-services and speak at community events. CRY-ROP will continue to provide strong support for Branley and Fernando's efforts by helping them with meeting preparation, presentations, and limited logistical support if needed.