

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT 2024 | CELEBRATING OUR 20 YEAR JOURNEY

LOOKING BACK
MOVING *FORWARD*



OUR MISSION is to engage underserved young people through community-based education, mentoring, enrichment, and employment readiness programs to help them develop skills and strengthen ties to family and community.





Looking Back and Moving Forward

Dear Friends,

This annual report celebrates YEP's first 20 years, reflecting what we have accomplished together on behalf of young people and families in the Greater New Orleans region.

In 2004, YEP began as Louisiana's first juvenile reentry program, operating out of a small rented storefront in Central City with just five employees serving a handful of young people. With the support and belief of so many, YEP has expanded over the past two decades. Today, we offer a comprehensive range of community-based services to nearly 1,000 young people annually, operate in five neighborhoods, employ nearly 60 people, and own three debt-free buildings. Over the years, YEP has positively impacted the lives of more than 10,000 individuals—all made possible by you, our dedicated staff, board members, partners, participants, families, volunteers, and donors.

YEP has grown into a highly regarded, fiscally sound, and sustainable organization. Our strong financial position, supported by a diverse funding stream and a reserve fund, allows us to navigate challenges, just as we have through past hurricanes, economic downturns, and a global pandemic. To further secure YEP's future and ensure our long-term impact, this year our generous Board of Directors established an endowment—an investment in the young people and communities we serve for decades to come.

We have spent the year reconnecting with alumni who are thriving; celebrating with past board members, partners, and donors; and hosting unforgettable events, including our gala at the Smoothie King Center and a celebration at our Youth Center in Central City. This year has been one of reflection, gratitude, and immense pride in what we have built together.

Looking ahead, there is so much to be hopeful for. I invite you to remain part of our journey—one that builds on two decades of learning, growth, and impact while staying focused on our vision: a community where all young people have access to the opportunities, skills, resources, and relationships they need to reach their full potential.

Warmly,

Melissa Sawyer, Co-Founder & CEO

FORWARD

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WHY WE STARTED. WHY WE CONTINUE.

Melissa Sawyer and two colleagues co-founded YEP in 2004 as the first juvenile reentry program in the state supporting youth who were returning home to their families and communities from incarceration. The organization grew out of the Louisiana Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2003 (Act 1225), which emphasized community-based services over incarceration.

One year later, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city, displacing YEP staff and youth. Despite unprecedented challenges, the YEP team reconnected with participants to continue providing vital services. That flexibility, determination, and resiliency would prove to be invaluable in the face of future challenges, from storms to the pandemic.

Over the past 20 years, YEP has transformed from that small organization serving a handful of youth into one of the most comprehensive nonprofits in Greater New Orleans providing services to young people and their families. Today, **YEP offers community-based mentoring, enrichment, education, and employment-readiness training to nearly 1,000 individuals from 13 parishes across five locations** each year, all at no cost to participants. Our growth has been driven by community needs, and those needs continue to grow—as does the remarkable potential of the youth we serve.

ONWARD



YEP MENTORS (Est. 2004)



Shamarr Moses

YEP Mentors is a community-based mentoring program for young people ages 8 to 21 who have been referred because they are in need of additional support. Participants are connected with a dedicated Youth Advocate who delivers mentoring and case management services to young people and support to their families. The program operates from Orleans and St. Charles Parishes but reaches youth in 13 parishes.

YEP has been mentoring youth since our inception in 2004, when we began as the first program of its kind in the state to support formerly incarcerated young people as they returned to their families and communities. Today, *YEP Mentors* focuses more on preventing young people from engagement in the juvenile justice system, and the majority of participants do not have any justice involvement. Youth participating in *YEP Mentors* benefit from wrap-around services. **Youth Advocates connect with participants three to four times a week, help them set and achieve individualized goals, and offer holistic support that provides them with the tools they need to realize their full potential.**

As a sixth grader in 2015, **Shamarr Moses** brimmed with curiosity but lacked the skills to clearly express himself. Today, a senior at Nicholls State University, Shamarr is Station Manager at the campus TV station, writes for regional news outlets, and routinely makes the President's List. Shamarr credits YEP for helping him effectively channel his energy. His Youth Advocate, Mr. John, has guided, nurtured, and cared for Shamarr since they first met in 2015. Shamarr said, "The impact he has had on my life is immeasurable." As a leader at Nicholls, Shamarr now passes along life lessons he has gained to fellow students. "Mr. John motivates me to this day."

ENCOURAGE







YEP EDUCATES (Est. 2006)

YEP Educates is one of only five programs in Orleans Parish recognized by the Louisiana Community and Technical College System as an official adult education provider. The program expands life opportunities and earning potential by providing a flexible, alternative pathway for students ages 16 and older to build literacy skills, earn their high school equivalency (HiSET), and transition into postsecondary education and advanced training. *YEP Educates* operates in three locations: Mid-City, New Orleans East, and Algiers.

In 2006, after Hurricane Katrina, many young people returned to New Orleans to find their schools closed or destroyed, or they lacked the documents needed to re-enroll. YEP responded by offering accessible high school equivalency support at its office. Initially called NOPLAY (New Orleans Providing Literacy to All Youth), over the past 18 years, **YEP Educates has grown significantly, providing instruction to thousands of individuals and awarding 689 graduates and counting with their high school equivalency diploma.**

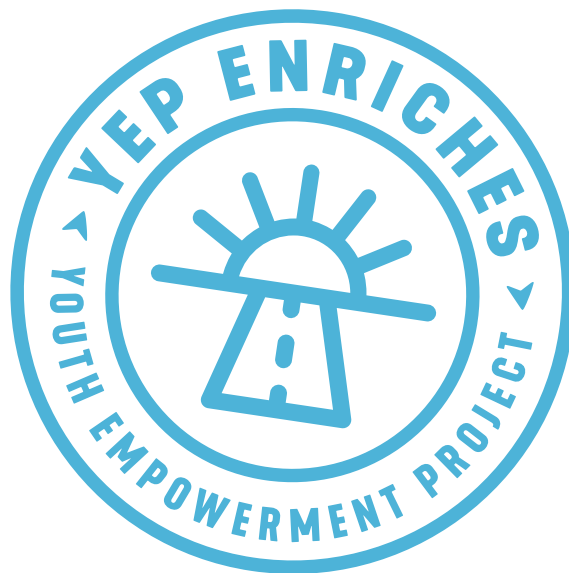
Rogdericka Ellis always dreamed of finishing school, but that goal became difficult when Hurricane Katrina disrupted her plans as she was about to enter seventh grade, and her family temporarily relocated to Detroit. After facing years of setbacks, she earned her high



Rogdericka Ellis

school equivalency in 2013 through *YEP Educates*. Rogdericka went on to earn a bachelor's degree in education, became an elementary school teacher, and started her own business, Paradise Candles. Today, she motivates and guides young people to help them achieve their goals through her work at a local, community-based nonprofit, "just like YEP did for me," she says. "YEP helped me achieve education and career goals I didn't even know were possible."

ADVANCE



YEP ENRICHES (Est. 2009)

YEP Enriches provides free out-of-school time enrichment for young people ages 7 to 16, including after-school programming and summer camps. **Offerings include drumline, dance team, academic support, sports and arts instruction, and daily healthy meals. The program operates in Central City and New Orleans East.**



Dontaye Barnes

YEP's Central City office grew into a neighborhood hub after Hurricane Katrina as more and more neighborhood youth began spending time there with the staff. YEP began stocking the space with snacks, helping with homework, and letting the young people play games on the office computers. By 2009, YEP recognized the need in the community for out-of-school time programming and formalized and expanded this work by starting its third program, *YEP Enriches*. The program includes creative enrichment and trauma-informed social-emotional learning to foster creativity, support mental health and resilience, and build community.

Dontaye Barnes was a teenager living in Central City when a friend first brought him to *YEP Enriches*. "After that, it was an everyday thing," he said. He played basketball, got homework help, and learned lasting lessons. "*YEP Enriches* changed my mindset by helping me look at the big picture and have more patience," Dontaye said. It also led him to the *YEP Works* program, where he has worked as a Bike Works Mechanic since he completed the program in 2019. He said, "Because of YEP, I am able to continue to be a better person."

GROW





THRIFT WORKS





YEP WORKS (Est. 2012)



Victoria Roy

This work-based learning program allows participants, ages 16 to 24, to earn hourly stipends while developing social-emotional competencies and gaining transferable employment skills. They can also pursue internships at YEP's retail outlets, *YEP Bike Works* and *YEP Thrift Works*, and attain industry-recognized customer service

credentials through the National Retail Federation. The program operates in Central City and New Orleans East. In 2012, YEP launched *YEP Works* (then called the Trafigura Work and Learn Center) with initial support from the Trafigura Foundation, a philanthropic organization based in Geneva, Switzerland. This program was only the second of its kind in the United States funded by Trafigura. Now greatly expanded, **YEP Works equips young people with job-readiness training and essential life skills, empowering them to realize their full potential.**

As a young mother, **Victoria Roy** wanted to expand her career opportunities to be able to take care of herself and her child. In 2018, she joined the *YEP Works* program. "YEP gave me an opportunity that I didn't see myself having, juggling a young child and being able to find a work-and-learn program. YEP gifted me wisdom and knowledge about work life and broader life skills. It was all-encompassing." Now a busy freelance designer, Victoria and her family are working toward owning a home. "I feel fortunate, and YEP was extremely impactful at a formative time. I truly found a family in YEP."

PROGRESS

2024: OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

983

PARTICIPANTS SERVED

WHO WE SERVE

BY AGE

14% 12 and younger
9% 13 to 15
14% 16 to 17
34% 18 to 24
29% 25 and older

BY GENDER

55% male
45% female

BY RACE

81% African American
12% Hispanic/Latino
6% Caucasian
1% other

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

69% under \$20,000
80% below poverty level
*determined by household income
and size (\$31,200 for a family of
four in LA in 2024)*

HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

67% single female
9% single male
24% two parents

2024: OUR IMPACT

99%

of participants were
satisfied with their YEP
experience, according to a
satisfaction survey

90%

of participants said that
YEP helped them to feel
better prepared to achieve
their goals, according to a
satisfaction survey

87%

of participants improved
their emotional wellbeing,
according to standardized
assessments



PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS



177

youth were paired with a Youth Advocate

94%

of participants had no further justice system involvement at the time of program completion

83%

of participants improved their academic performance



461

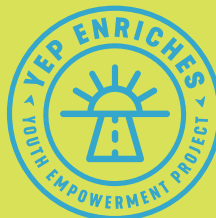
students engaged in educational pursuits

84

people obtained their high school equivalency (HiSET) diplomas, totaling 689 since YEP Educates began in 2006

77

individuals engaged in new HiSET en Español and English Language Learner classes



230

young people enjoyed out-of-school time enrichment

86%

of youth who received educational support demonstrated improvement in school performance

97%

of youth who participated in music and arts programming increased their skill in the arts



115

participants gained work-readiness training

96%

of participants completed the National Retail Federation customer services credential

35

participants moved into YEP Works internships at YEP Bike Works or Thrift Works

OUR PROGRESS

YEP started in 2004 with a budget of \$235,000 and 5 employees and now has an annual budget of over \$6 million and employs 55 people.

2024 FINANCIALS

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,270,781
Investments	4,115,783
Accrued interest	52,161
Promises to give, net	1,006,997
Reimbursements receivable	479,067
Inventory	37,961
Prepaid expenses and other assets	<u>95,353</u>

TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS 7,058,103

Assets restricted to investment in property, furniture, and equipment at cost less accumulated depreciation	1,209,132
Promises to give, net	400,000
Operating lease right-of-use asset	<u>138,239</u>

TOTAL ASSETS \$ 8,805,474

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$ 154,218
Deferred revenue	1,203,332
Operating lease liability	<u>27,303</u>
Total current liabilities	1,384,853
Operating lease liability, net of current maturities	110,936
Total long-term liabilities	<u>110,936</u>

TOTAL LIABILITIES 1,495,789

Net Assets

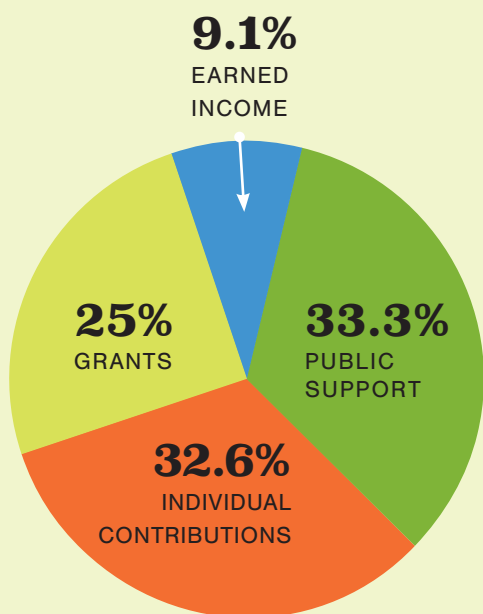
Without donor restrictions	7,274,685
With donor restrictions	<u>35,000</u>

TOTAL NET ASSETS 7,309,685

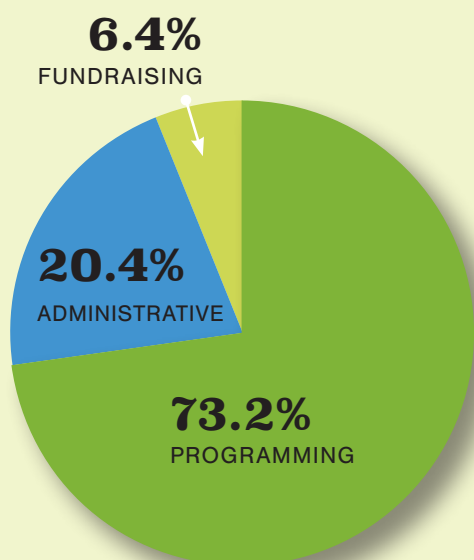
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS \$ 8,805,474



SOURCES OF INCOME



EXPENSES



OUR CORE PURPOSE

is to empower young people to improve their lives and the lives of others.

OUR CORE VALUES

are accountability, respect, progress, integrity and kindness.

WE ENVISION

a community where all young people have access to the opportunities, skills, resources, and relationships they need to reach their full potential.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR CELEBRATIONS



THANKS TO ALL OUR SPONSORS!

PRESENTING SPONSOR THE GAYLE AND TOM BENSON OCHSNER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

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Wilson Family Fund
The 18th Ward

Celebration co-chairs

Gayle Benson
Terrah Green
Meredith Hale-Griffin
Stephanie November

Celebration co-captains

Shelley Massengale
Jackie Weill



ANN AND ROBERT BOH CELEBRATION HONOREES

YEP honored Ann and Robert Boh for their transformative support at our Patron Party and Gala Celebration presented by the Gayle and Tom Benson Ochsner Children's Hospital at the Smoothie King Center. Their generosity and leadership have had a profound impact on YEP, benefiting our staff, youth, and families. In recognition of their contributions, YEP's Youth Center in Central City, the first building we owned debt-free, was renamed the Michael R. Boh Youth Center. **"Ann and Robert have played a pivotal role in YEP's growth and are deeply committed to our ongoing success,"** said YEP Co-Founder & CEO Melissa Sawyer. "They are integral to YEP's story, and we are truly grateful."





YEP celebrated 20 years with a gala at the Smoothie King Center, when YEP colors lit up the Caesars Superdome, and at a block party at our Michael R. Boh Youth Center.







OUR JOURNEY CONTINUES

Thank you for supporting YEP. With your help, we can continue to empower youth to improve their lives and the lives of others and to reach their full potential for decades to come. Please consider the following ways to make a difference:

VOLUNTEER

- Assist with workshops or events
- Request that your company's volunteers contribute their time
- Share your skills (e.g., legal, marketing, tutoring)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Consider a recurring, honorarium, or estate gift
- Ask if your employer offers a donation matching program
- Sponsor a young person, programming, or event

OFFER IN-KIND SUPPORT

- Shop at and donate to YEP Bike Works and Thrift Works
- Offer event support (e.g., food, beverages, venue space)
- Donate program supplies (e.g., art supplies, technology, sports equipment)

LEARN MORE

- Explore our website
- Tour one of YEP's five locations
- Set up a time to meet with a YEP team member

SPREAD THE WORD

- Follow and share our work on social media
- Share our youth spotlight stories with friends and family
- Partner with us to host a fundraising event

