

Growing Capacity

Identifying professional development and organizational supports needed to facilitate youth participatory action research (YPAR) in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming

Authored in 2020 by: Brandon Louie, Deedee Chao, Sarina Rodriguez, Miranda Capriotti, Eli Figueroa, Cristina Luquin, Carmela Padilla, Rosalinda Ruiz, Paul Tabarez, Chris Gomez Wong, and Nancy Erbstein, with Charles Go, Cathryn Johnson, Yu Meng, Marisa Neelon and Kamaljeet Singh-Khaira



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Acknowledgments

This documentation was compiled by the UC Davis Center for Regional Change in collaboration with the UC Davis School of Education (Nancy Erbstein, Associate Professor of Education in Residence, PI; Brandon Louie, CRC Community Engagement Coordinator; Deedee Chao, CRC Student Assistant; and Sarina Rodriguez, CRC Community Engagement Research Specialist) and commissioned by the CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California State Office as part of its Youth Engagement Initiative. Technical assistance was also provided to sites by the Public Health Institute Center for Wellness and Nutrition and the UC 4-H Youth Development Program. Chelsea Jimenez and Sarina Rodriguez, from the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, designed the report. This report would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) staff and youth leaders in the profiled programs, listed here in alphabetical order by county and last name.

Contra Costa County

Staff Members

Eli Figueroa, Charles Go, and Marisa Neelon

Project 4-H2O Youth Leaders

Brenda Garcia, Rosa Heraldez, Olivia Lee, Farangiz Malikova, and Daphney Saviotti

The group would also like to thank John Swett High School; CalFresh Healthy Living, UC; UC ANR 4-H Program-CCC; and East Bay Municipal Utility District.

El Dorado County: Georgetown

Staff Members

Miranda Capriotti, Cathryn Johnson, Hector Ochoa, and Carmela Padilla

Georgetown School of Innovation Youth Leaders

Addison, Aidan, Alexis, Ben, Cara, Destin, Dakota, Issac, Jaden, Kaelee, Lily, Nick, Perry, Ronin, Shauna, Shaylen, Trinity, Tristan, and Wyatt

El Dorado County: South Lake Tahoe

Staff Members

Cathryn Johnson, Cristina Luquin, and Hector Ochoa

The group would like to thank Sabrina Zalles, the AVID teacher at South Tahoe High School.

Imperial County: Calexico

Staff Members

Chris Gomez Wong, Yu Meng, and Paul Tabarez

Calexico High School's Eco-Garden Club Youth Leaders

Aleyda Arana, Cecilia Arellano, Bryan Salcedo, and Scott Tessman

The group would also like to thank Chef Fernando Nuñez with Calexico High School and Angel Esparza with miCalexico.

Imperial County: Meadows Union

Staff MembersA

Chris Gomez Wong, Yu Meng, and Paul Tabarez

Meadows Union Elementary School's Helping Hands Active Knights (HHAK) Youth LeadersA

Alieda Burns, Nadia Cano, Sofia Cano, Eliza Carrola, Henry Carrola, Nayeli Chiang, Isabella Gaona, Diego Gonzalez, Camila Gutierrez, Alexia Murphy, Kaydi Self, and Kyle Self

The group would also like to thank the Meadows Union School District, Meadows Union Elementary School, Principal Keila Rodriguez, local ASES Coordinator Edith Martinez, and the local After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program.

Merced County

Staff MembersA

Rosalinda Ruiz and Jaci Westbrook

The group would like to thank Marciela Pimentel, Spanish for Health Careers teacher at Atwater High School.

How to Use This Report

This report documents the work of six CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California (CFHL, UC) county programs that facilitated a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project as part of the Youth Engagement Initiative during Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2019. YPAR is a process that engages young people in using the tools of research to critically assess conditions that shape their lives, with the goal of supporting action to improve those conditions. This report highlights diverse examples of YPAR in action within SNAP-Education programs, with a focus on the professional development and organizational supports needed for extension educators using YPAR methodologies. In California, the name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Education) is CalFresh Healthy Living. After a brief introduction, this report explores the key themes of capacity building, professional development and organizational supports within CFHL, UC YPAR projects and examines the many lessons learned from these case studies during FFY 2019, concluding with profiles of all six projects.

Since no two YPAR projects are the same, the information presented here is intended as a reference rather than a step-by-step manual. These case studies and their promising practices offer examples of what is possible as youth and program facilitators craft youth-led PSE change efforts that fit the specific needs and circumstances of their unique communities.

The Documentation Process

Information provided here was collected in several ways:

- » monthly check-in calls and additional technical assistance conversations with individual counties;
- » a pre-project survey with UCCE staff;
- » pre- and post-project interviews with UCCE staff;
- » statewide youth engagement conference calls that occurred quarterly and involved all CFHL, UC counties engaged in this work;
- » site visits and in-person meetings;
- » youth-produced final reports, videos, and presentations;
- » archived items and program documents from counties; and
- » extensive field notes.

Documentation, analysis, and presentation of professional development and organizational supports needed to implement YPAR were conducted collaboratively by staff and faculty associated with the UC Davis Center for Regional Change and UCCE Advisors from Imperial County, Contra Costa County, and the Central Sierra Cluster.

The Youth Engagement Initiative

Launched in FFY 2016, *CFHL, UC's* Youth Engagement Initiative is exploring innovative strategies to engage youth in nutrition and physical activity. Projects within this initiative seek to empower young people from vulnerable communities to lead efforts that improve the environments where they live, play, eat, shop, and learn.

The Youth Engagement Initiative embraces core youth development principles, as well as USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP–Ed) Guidance that employ policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change activities—such as multi-level interventions and community and public health approaches—in addition to providing direct nutrition education (for a full definition of PSE, please see the Fiscal Year 2019 SNAP–Ed Plan Guidance, pp. 16–18).ⁱ *CFHL, UC* recognized that youth who would be impacted by PSE decisions should be involved in identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating the change interventions themselves. The goal of this initiative is to build the capacity of youth to contribute to PSE changes that help make the healthy choice the easy and preferred choice, while developing their leadership abilities, sense of self-efficacy, civic engagement, and college and career readiness. Throughout this process, UCCE staff serve as adult allies, a term used in the field and within this report to acknowledge their role as intergenerational collaborators committed to supporting and facilitating youth-centered efforts.

In FFY 2019, the *CFHL, UC* Youth Engagement Initiative built upon its previous programmatic effortsⁱⁱ with an expanded cohort model for training and technical assistance and a stronger collaboration with UCCE Advisors overseeing YPAR projects in their

counties. Three different cohorts tailored to practitioners with various levels of experience supported the full spectrum of SNAP-Ed youth engagement strategies, encouraging collective learning and mentorship for staff facilitating direct education, student nutrition advisory councils (or SNAC clubs), teens-as-teachers, YPAR, and other approaches. This report documents the work of UCCE staff members engaged in FFY 2019's YPAR cohort.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

YPAR engages young people as research leaders, promoting process-oriented, reflexive research and action driven by youth's perspectives, strengths and cultural wealth. YPAR supports youth to study and address social issues that impact them in ways that build their capacities as civic actors.ⁱⁱⁱ This approach helps achieve SNAP-Ed's nutrition education and obesity prevention goals by positioning young people to become advocates for PSE changes that promote healthy nutrition and physical activity in their communities. It is recognized by SNAP-Ed as a practice-tested PSE strategy that "aims to empower youth and achieve environmental changes related to health and nutrition" by having young people "identify their own issues, problems, and possible solutions."^{iv} YPAR projects "provide youth with the opportunity to engage in leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, service learning, and strategizing skills to address and promote nutrition and/or physical activity issues. It is part of an overall goal to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, and physical activity."^v

Professional Development and Organizational Supports Needed to Facilitate YPAR

Provided here is a brief summary of points informing the work of future CFHL, UC YPAR projects from Neelon, M., Meng, Y., Johnson, C., Go, C., Louie, B., Chao, D., & Erbstein, N. Forthcoming. California youth participatory action research projects illustrate extension staff and organizational needs. Journal of Extension. This manuscript contains detailed findings of key professional development and organizational supports needed to facilitate YPAR and is under review.

Documentation of CFHL, UC YPAR projects during FFY 2019 focused on exploring the individual and organizational capacity building and support needed for county-based nutrition educators to effectively facilitate YPAR projects and support community partners to do so. UCCE staff identified a number of topics that were central to their professional development in this field—including comprehensive knowledge about positive youth development practices, PSE changes, and YPAR—as well as key skills related to relationship building, facilitation, adapting YPAR toolkits to fit local conditions, and designing and conducting research. Staff also highlighted how the skills and knowledge needed to implement YPAR positively contributed to other areas of their professional practice. By using foundational youth engagement techniques learned through YPAR training and by implementing YPAR programming, they expanded their professional skill sets with which they approach all of their programmatic activities. For example, staff described how learning YPAR facilitation methods and youth engagement principles also improved their approach to direct education, shifting them towards a more learner-centered approach where students can take the lead and feel more empowered in the

classroom, which resulted in greater engagement. YPAR resources, tools, and exercises also were useful for team building, icebreakers, communication, and partnership development with possible collaborators and community stakeholders.

This year's documentation effort also revealed a variety of supports organizations should provide for staff facilitating YPAR projects. Notable points included the importance of adequate staff time and resources, as well as supervision from people who are knowledgeable about YPAR and its unique requirements. UCCE staff recognized the benefits of a comprehensive support system for training and technical assistance that combined individualized coaching, in-person training workshops, and networking and mentorship within a supportive community of practice. Looking to FFY 2020 and beyond, on the programmatic side staff sought increased collaboration with the UC 4-H Youth Development Program. They also highlighted the importance of PSE program sustainability, expressing an interest in a train-the-trainer extender model for YPAR and greater recognition of youth development outcomes that are achieved as a result of participation in a YPAR project. Lessons learned from this year's documentation work will continue to shape training and support for future YPAR projects within *CFHL*, *UC's* Youth Engagement Initiative.

What follows are profiles of the six *CFHL*, *UC* YPAR projects that took place during FFY 2019.

YPAR Projects Overview

Project	Contra Costa: Crockett	El Dorado: Georgetown	El Dorado: South Lake Tahoe	Imperial: Calexico	Imperial: Meadows Union	Merced: Atwater
Setting & Duration	After school, 9 months	In-school, 9 months	In-school, 2 months	After school, 9 months	After school, 9 months	In-school, 5 months
Key Partners	School, parents, UC 4-H, EBMUD	School, 6 th grade class, local community	School	School, ASSETS program, school district	School, ASES program	School
Youth Leaders	5 high school students	12-15 elementary school students	N/A—adult ally outreach to high school students	12 high school students	14 K-8 students	21 high school students
Issue	Public awareness around hydration on campus	Developing the school garden	Healthy food access	Healthy food access via farm-to-school grant; edible gardening	Food insecurity and community gardens	Healthy vs. unhealthy food access and childhood obesity
Research Methods	Survey, drinking water promotion campaign	Interviews, community outreach, mapping	Community outreach, survey	Survey, PhotoVoice	Secondary source research	Observation and photo documentation, mapping, interviews
Final Product & Recommendations	Presentation with infographic to the school board; deeper intervention could further improve students' water consumption	Presentation on YPAR and school garden to the school; video of student and teacher interviews; funds for YPAR work next year	Include healthy food options for school lunch	Slideshow video presented to LSWP committee; farm-to-school grant advocacy with school district	Final report, slide presentation, and video to present to City Council and stakeholders; explore farm-to-school grant application	Slide show with video and visuals presented to the school principal and staff

Contra Costa County John Swett High School's Project 4-H2O



Project Overview

UCCE Contra Costa County staff continued the YPAR project that they began in September 2016, expanding their work around the issue of hydration. Marisa Neelon (Nutrition, Family, & Consumer Sciences Advisor) and Charles Go (UC 4-H Youth Development Advisor) supported the project as advisors, and Eli Figueroa (Project 4-H2O Coordinator) served as the primary adult ally and facilitator who worked with the students on a weekly basis in coordination with their school site. Five high school students were involved and met once per week for 1.5 hours over the course of the school year to carry out their project. This year, the youth focused on building public awareness around hydration and water infrastructure on campus.

Setting

- John Swett High School is located in Crockett, a community with a population of just over 3,000 people, located northeast of San Francisco. Crockett was created as a company town for the California and Hawaiian Sugar Company (C&H).
- During the 2018-19 school year, John Swett High School served 453 students, with 16% identifying as African American, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 14% Asian, 11% Filipino, 33% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.2% Pacific Islander, 18% White, and 7% Multiracial. 10% of students at the school were English Language Learners and 59% of students in the district qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Project Details & Partnerships

- This year's work continued to be jointly funded by CalFresh Healthy Living, UC in partnership with UC ANR's 4-H Youth Development Program in Contra Costa County.
- Partnerships and relationships with the school community also helped facilitate the project. The high school principal offered his support and gave approval for the students to conduct their research on campus.
- The youth maintained a partnership with the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) by helping them collect data on water usage from the water bottle refilling station on the first floor of their school. In exchange, EBMUD provided their "Water on Wheels" mobile water trailer to support the youth's second time participating in the city's annual Sugartown Festival, where they hosted their very own Project 4-H2O booth.

Youth Recruitment

- Eli began recruitment at the start of the school year by tabling at the school's open house. He also posted fliers all over the school, inviting students to apply for the student researcher positions. The principal, career counselor, and librarian also helped Eli promote Project 4-H2O by word-of-mouth, encouraging students to apply. Student applicants completed a short online application via Qualtrics, and seven students were initially selected. Two students were unable to continue because of other commitments and competing activities.
- Of the final five students involved, there was one senior and four juniors. The senior was a returning member from the previous year and this experience led her to take on a leadership and mentorship role for the rest of the students as they started out.
- Eli also hosted a meet-and-greet event for the group's parents to introduce himself as the adult ally of the project and provide more information about YPAR and their efforts.

Issue & Research Question

- To decide on the specific issue and research question, Eli took the students to do observational preliminary research throughout the high school campus, asking them to think about potential issues related to water access and water infrastructure and how this might affect students' water consumption.
- In addition to the preliminary research, the students themselves were interested in weighing the benefits of water versus the harms of sugar-sweetened beverages. This interest led them to want to increase their own knowledge around the issue, and then use this knowledge to build public awareness by educating their peers at school.
- The new water bottle refilling stations that the 2016-17 Project 4-H2O youth cohort had advocated for were not installed this year because the school's renovation construction project was delayed.
- The lack of new water stations, coupled with the group's preliminary research and their interest in public awareness, led to the following research question: **what effect does a drinking water promotion campaign (or intervention) have on student beverage consumption habits while at school?**

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- To answer their research question, the YPAR group decided to design a seven-week drinking water promotion campaign and evaluate it with a pre- and post-survey of the student body.
 - » Youth designed the survey with support from Eli, referring to previous 4-H2O surveys for guidance. The resultant survey had 14 questions, which Marisa and Charles reviewed and submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval.
 - » The pre-survey was administered via Kindle tablets and paper surveys, with over 450 students providing their input. Students who completed the survey were all given free stickers and entered into a raffle for free water bottles.
- The seven-week drinking water promotion campaign included the following components:
 - » *Videos:* 1-2-minute video clips were created and released weekly, and teachers were able to show these clips during morning announcements. These six video clips aimed to educate the school about the benefits of drinking water and the harms of consuming sugar-sweetened beverages through the use of skits the students co-produced and filmed.
 - » *Signage:*
 - Students who completed the pre- and post-surveys were given free Project 4-H2O stickers and entered into a raffle for free water bottles. The stickers helped advertise and promote awareness about the campaign on campus.
 - The group designed and created a poster with their campaign's slogan, "Don't Wait! Hydrate! It's always time to drink water!" This signage was placed by each of the school's eight working water fountains (four indoor, four outdoor). A few other posters were also placed strategically in areas with a lot of foot traffic.
 - Water drop decals were installed on the floor to help lead students to the indoor water fountains and encourage them to hydrate. Window cling decals were also installed on the doors at the school's main entrance to inform students about the water bottle refilling station on the first floor.
 - Two large banners were placed near the office to encourage students to drink more water, with the banners displaying the Project 4-H2O logo and slogan.
 - » *Outreach:* students hosted "Rethink Your Drink Day" during lunchtime to 1) encourage everyone at school to drink more water; 2) to provide education about the amount of sugar in popular sugary drinks; 3) to provide flavored water tastings and recipe cards; and 4) to ask for student and staff support.
 - Students used a spin-the-wheel game—so members of the school could guess how much sugar was in their drink—and provided a flavor origami activity. Those who participated were also given Project 4-H2O stickers.

Recommendations & Final Products

- Based on the data collected, the YPAR group noticed that there was an increase in water consumption at the water bottle refilling station. This led them to consider whether more positive behavior could be encouraged via more signage and a longer intervention.
- The YPAR group used the data they collected and analyzed to create an infographic that they presented to the school board a week after the school year ended. The youth presented their findings and also made specific requests of the board members: 1) funding to provide education and signage for the incoming water bottle refilling stations; 2) more frequent cleaning/sanitization of existing water fountains; 3) funding for student water bottles; and 4) an update of the campus map to include water fountain locations/icons.

Action & Outcomes

- Youth were awarded full scholarships to attend the 10th Biennial Childhood Obesity Conference in Anaheim, which ran July 15-18, 2019.
- The group was invited to host a booth space at Crockett's Sugartown Festival for the second time.
- Project 4-H2O members provided the school board with a water bottle budget, and one student was appointed as the student school board representative for John Swett High School.
- The school district updated the high school campus map to include a water drop to indicate the location of the first-floor hydration station.

Next Steps & Program Sustainability

- Next year's YPAR project will incorporate a model in which the high school students have opportunities to mentor middle school students interested in carrying out a YPAR project.
- The focal issue of the YPAR project will remain hydration and the youth will also explore funding opportunities for sustaining their project.
- Project 4-H2O had previously received approval for the installation of additional water stations, which would be incorporated into renovations and construction work at the high school. This installation has not yet taken place and the group will continue to monitor its progress.



**DRINK SMARTER
CHOOSE WATER!**

El Dorado County Georgetown School of Innovation's School Garden YPAR Project



Project Overview

El Dorado County UCCE staff continued the YPAR project that they began the previous year at Georgetown School of Innovation, which involved advocating for and working on a new, relocated school garden. Nutrition Educators Carmela Padilla and Miranda Capriotti were the main adult allies on this YPAR project. Katie Johnson, Nutrition, Family, & Consumer Sciences Advisor, supported them. UCCE staff continued to work with Mrs. Brown's sixth grade classroom, meeting once a week. Due to a shift in Mrs. Brown's class to an elective course, student availability for the project fluctuated throughout the year. Thirty students were originally involved however this number decreased to 12 in November and ended with 15 from March until the end of the school year.

Setting

- Georgetown School of Innovation is part of the Black Oak Mine Unified School District, which serves the Georgetown divide, a rural area located along the border of El Dorado and Placer Counties. The town itself is a tight-knit community of approximately 2,300 people.
- During the 2018-19 school year, Georgetown School of Innovation served 224 students, with 1% identifying as African American, 4% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% Asian, 10% Hispanic/Latinx, 1% Pacific Islander, 79% White, and 3% Multiracial. 2% of students were English Language Learners and 61% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Project Details & Partnerships

- During the previous year, the YPAR group had secured a garden space on campus, but the space itself had no infrastructure, plants or other amenities. To continue with that project, students involved in YPAR this year worked on developing the garden space by deciding what they wanted to put in it, fundraising, working with the community to obtain items, and planting their choice of crops.
- Mrs. Brown has continued to be a strong supporter of the YPAR project and has become accustomed to the YPAR framework after working with Miranda and Carmela for two years. Mrs. Brown often served as the liaison between Miranda and Carmela and the school principal, Dr. Westsmith, and supported the educators during YPAR class time.
- Other stakeholders and collaborators in both the school and the surrounding community have been integral to the success of this YPAR project.
 - » The school maintenance crew, garden coordinator, and other school teachers helped with the project this year by moving items to the garden space, figuring out what to put inside the garden space, and working with the students by getting feedback or leading action teams, respectively.
 - » Students' parents became involved by helping to construct garden boxes for the space. One parent volunteer also helped coordinate planting and maintenance for the space and another started a fundraiser to help raise funds for the project.
 - » The Divide Garden Club in Georgetown provided a mini garden grant of \$250 to the YPAR project, which was used to purchase six fruit trees for the garden space.
 - » Cristina Luquin, another UCCE Nutrition Educator in El Dorado County, also came to Georgetown a few times to offer support and work with the students.

Youth Recruitment

- Students were recruited through Mrs. Brown's class. Since this is not the first year YPAR was conducted at this site, some students were already somewhat informed about the school garden and the work of previous YPAR projects.

Issue & Research Question

- At the end of the first half of the school year, after students learned about YPAR in general and the site's specific ongoing YPAR project, the educators engaged the students in a goal-setting activity to determine what they wanted to achieve with the YPAR project before the end of the school year.
- The students decided that **one of their top goals was to plant something in the garden that would address healthy food access for the school.**

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- To design the garden space in a way that would address healthy food access, the students engaged in an activity called "Ideal vs. Real." The students listed what they

would ideally like in the space, and then reconciled this with what was realistically feasible. Upon completing the second step, the students realized that fundraising would be necessary to buy the items that they wanted in the space.

- To plan their fundraiser, the group brainstormed approaches that would align with their YPAR project goals and be achievable using available resources. The students came up with the idea of Valentine's Day seed grams—boxes with seeds that could be purchased and planted.
 - » The group split into action teams, creating an ambassador team, an advertising team, a spirit team, and a communications team to oversee different aspects of the fundraiser campaign.
- After the fundraiser, students repeated the “Ideal vs. Real” activity to guide how and what they could purchase for the space, and discussed other ways to obtain items, such as donations.
 - » In addition, the YPAR team engaged in a mapping activity to determine the layout of the garden space. They split up into groups and came up with four different potential maps of the garden. Using the maps, the students discussed what items would be needed to achieve their desired garden designs, and considered what the maps all had in common to develop a shared vision.
 - » The group also used surveys from past years and conducted interviews with Pre-K teachers to help decide what should go in the space. Based on this input, students decided to paint stencils on the blacktop in the garden that could be used by the Pre-K students. The YPAR team collaborated with the Pre-K teachers to determine the design and reached out to the school and surrounding community for donations of painting materials.

Recommendations & Final Products

- The students created a presentation about the school garden, describing YPAR, their project activity, and the resulting garden space. The students' presentation was featured at the school's Town Hall where all of the classes assemble for a meeting and was well received by the audience of students and teachers.
- The YPAR team also created videos by conducting and filming interviews with fellow students and teachers on campus. Carmela and Miranda assisted in editing the video, which was presented to the fifth/sixth-grade split class at the end of the school year.

Action & Outcomes

- The Valentine's Day seed grams fundraiser raised \$172—more than three times the original fundraising goal of \$50—that the students were able to save for future usage. It also served to get the community further involved with and aware of the garden space.
- Six garden beds, a water station, playground stencils for the Pre-K students, umbrellas, signage, a compost bin, gardening tools, and a shed were all acquired and placed in the garden. The six garden beds were fully planted by the end of the year.

- Students assembled a “garden bug hotel” for the garden with donations from the Georgetown community and items they purchased using the funds that they raised.
- The student entertainment team considered what had been planted in the garden and created two recipes, for a smoothie and salsa, then polled people to find out which they would prefer. The salsa recipe raised interest, as other students had not realized salsa could be made just with ingredients from the garden.

Next Steps & Program Sustainability

- The students had hoped to plant early enough to be able to have a first harvest and make their harvested produce available in the school cafeteria. This could remain a goal for the new YPAR group in the upcoming school year.
- Miranda and Carmela are interested in building a YPAR educational pipeline at the school. Since they spend the first half of the year introducing YPAR to the sixth grade class, they would save time if students coming into the class were already familiar with YPAR and had background knowledge about SNAP-Ed related issues. This pipeline would involve direct education for the K-4 grades on the topics of food, nutrition and gardening, streamlining both the health education and the YPAR processes.



El Dorado County YPAR Outreach at South Tahoe High School



Overview

El Dorado County UCCE staff facilitated their first YPAR project at South Tahoe High School last year, but the teacher and students who were involved did not express interest in continuing that project. As a result, Cristina Luquin, the Nutrition Educator at the site, decided to continue outreach and solicit project ideas of interest from the general student body. She facilitated a multi-day tabling event to solicit student input during lunchtime and learned that while some students were interested, they had other commitments and mental health concerns that were priorities at the time.

Setting

- Outreach was conducted at South Tahoe High School, which is the only high school in the Lake Tahoe Unified School District that serves surrounding unincorporated communities. South Lake Tahoe, the city that the high school is located in, is near the California-Nevada state line, with a population of roughly 21,600 people and an economy mostly driven by tourism.
- During the 2018-19 school year, South Tahoe High School served 1,082 students, with 0.6% identifying as African American, 0.6% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% Asian, 5% Filipino, 41% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.3% Pacific Islander, 49% White, and 2% Multiracial. 13% of students were English Language Learners and 51% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Site Details & Partnerships

- Prior to the school year starting, the school principal supported plans for starting a nutrition club through which a YPAR project would be conducted. This nutrition club would be a lunchtime group and could not stay after school, which meant that the club would have only thirty minutes to meet each week. Cristina also received logistical support from the counseling staff and other teachers on campus, including the health teachers.

Youth Recruitment

- Cristina's tabling event took place over the course of three days in April:
 - » The first day involved passing out flyers and fruit-infused water, supporting the theme of "Rethink Your Drink" and encouraging students to hydrate with healthier options.
 - » The second day, Cristina hosted a popcorn and trail mix station. She administered a paper plate survey to elicit student opinions about their school lunches. Students expressed that the cafeteria food was unhealthy, hard to eat, and lacked fresh fruits or vegetables.
 - » The third day, Cristina offered fruit kebabs to the students as a response to the results of the paper plate survey.
- Students expressed a great deal of interest during the tabling event and the same students kept returning over the course of the three days.
- While the idea of starting a YPAR group received positive feedback, it was difficult to get interested students to commit to this effort because of their prior commitments to other school programs and their otherwise busy schedules. In addition, the allocation of only thirty minutes per week made it difficult to design an attractive program.
- Students expressed particular interest in doing a project focused on mental health, which unfortunately did not fall within SNAP-Ed guidelines.

Next Steps

- Students at the school identified mental health as a primary concern, suggesting the importance of adult allies at the site receiving training on trauma-informed practices and building capacity to recognize and address mental health issues.
- While continuing direct nutrition education at South Tahoe High School, Cristina will move to a new site at a middle school next year. She plans to start a Student Nutrition Advisory Council (SNAC) there that will utilize a YPAR framework.



Imperial County Calexico High School's Eco-Garden Club YPAR Project



Overview

Imperial County UCCE staff continued their work on Calexico High School's Eco-Garden Club YPAR project, with Chris Gomez Wong (UCCE Community Educator) serving as the main adult ally and facilitator. In January, Yu Meng was appointed as the new Youth, Family, and Community Advisor and provided support to the UCCE team through the rest of the school year. Chris worked with twelve students through the Eco-Garden Club on addressing food insecurity and developing a farm-to-school grant, meeting after school for an hour and a half once per week.

Setting & Duration

- Calexico High School is located in the city of the same name on the Mexico—United States border, with a population of approximately 39,000 people. Many students live in Mexicali, in Baja California, and travel across the border daily to attend school.
- During the 2018-19 school year, Calexico High School served 3,031 students, with 0.2% identifying as Asian, 99% Hispanic/Latinx, and 0.2% White. 52% of students were English Language Learners and 83% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Project Details & Partnerships

- This year's project had two objectives: determining school administrator interest in a farm-to-school program and working on edible gardening in the school and community.

- The main project partner at Calexico High School is the culinary instructor, Chef Nuñez, who acts as the group's key point of contact and support.
- To explore opportunities for the farm-to-school grant, Chris and the students met with food services directors and other administrators at the school district, some of whom were interested in becoming more involved in the YPAR project.

Youth Recruitment

- At the beginning of the school year, Chris met with youth on the freshman campus (a separate site from the campus for 10th-12th grade students) to introduce YPAR with the video that was created by last year's group. He discussed the application and interview process to promote buy-in and get students to take the YPAR project seriously.
- Continuing YPAR members proved to be much more effective at recruiting their peers than the adult allies. It worked well to have a few students who were invested in YPAR approach and recruit a team of peers.
- A dozen high school seniors and juniors were involved this year, with two seniors who were particularly active taking a large role in recruiting the others and keeping them involved. The two seniors who were particularly active were also the president and vice president of the school's Eco-Garden Club.

Issue & Research Question

- Last year's concerns centered around nutrition and access to healthy foods for Calexico High School students, with the team finding that their peers also disliked the school's cafeteria food and options.
- To build upon the previous group's research and continue to address this issue, **the YPAR group chose to advocate for pursuing a farm-to-school grant for Calexico High School this year.**
- The youth were also interested in possible solutions that might simultaneously address air quality and food insecurity. This led them to think about expanding their school garden and planting fruit trees, which could help improve air quality while providing fresh fruit. This line of inquiry inspired them to generate the following research question: **Will planting edible fruit trees in the community help address food insecurity?**

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- The YPAR team designed and disseminated a survey to school administrators to determine their level of interest in applying for a USDA farm-to-school grant and initiating a farm-to-school program at the high school.
 - » At first, the youth wanted to hold focus group interviews with administrators, but this proved unfeasible because of administrators' busy schedules. Surveys provided a more flexible option.
- The students also designed, and in May disseminated, a student survey to measure interest in gardening and edible fruit trees. This survey remained open throughout the summer and early fall to continue to collect input and received 353 responses.

- A Photovoice project was used to determine what city areas might benefit from additional shade and fruit trees.

Recommendations & Final Products

- The group met with the Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) committee to share the work they had accomplished on the edible garden. Team members originally hoped to participate in all the LSWP committee meetings to help push for changes in nutrition and food access policies, but the LSWP committee was not meeting regularly during this school year.
- To highlight their work, the group produced a five-minute video slideshow.

Action & Outcomes

- The team worked on the edible garden throughout the year and successfully expanded it, increasing the number of raised beds and the area under cultivation and accomplishing one of their primary project goals.
- The actions of the YPAR team initiated important discussions at their school site and throughout the district. The group initiated a serious conversation with the school district about applying for the USDA farm-to-school grant. They also reached out to a number of other stakeholders to explore this opportunity, including the Imperial Valley Vegetable Growers Association and the Imperial County Farm Bureau. Youth were able to get the Imperial Valley Food Services Cooperative interested and involved as a future partner and they received some buy-in from the food services directors as well. This discussion is ongoing.
- Additional attention around the Eco-Garden Club's YPAR efforts and their collaboration with Chef Nuñez's class led to the start of renovations for Chef Nuñez's culinary arts classroom after three years of discussion. Both the culinary instructor and Chris believe this is a result of YPAR efforts in planting and publicizing the school's edible garden.

Next Steps & Program Sustainability

- For next year's recruitment, Chris intends to focus outreach on youth who are not already active in student government or other leadership activities, so those who have had limited leadership opportunities can build their skills, experience and confidence through YPAR.
- This YPAR project will continue during the 2019-2020 school year with a new cohort of youth participants focused on the school's edible garden and developing a farm-to-school program with key stakeholders.



Imperial County Meadows Union Elementary School's Helping Hands Active Knights (HHAK) YPAR Project



Project Overview

Imperial County UCCE staff continued with the third year of their YPAR project at Meadows Union Elementary School. Paul Tabarez, UCCE Community Education Supervisor, continued to work as the project's main adult ally and facilitator. In January, Yu Meng was appointed as a new Youth, Family, and Community Advisor and provided support to the UCCE team through the rest of the school year. Paul met with fourteen 5th-8th grade students once per week for two to three hours after school to work on food insecurity issues through advocacy for community gardens.

Setting & Duration

- Meadows Union Elementary School is a rural K-8 school located between El Centro and Holtville, surrounded by agricultural fields and mobile home parks, with no walkability. El Centro is a city with a population of about 44,000 people and Holtville has approximately 6,400 people.
- During the 2018-19 school year, Meadows Union Elementary School served 492 students, with 0.8% identifying as African American, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 85% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.4% Pacific Islander, 13% White, and 0.6% Multiracial. 49% of students were English Language Learners and 74% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Project Details & Partnerships

- This year's project centered around addressing food insecurity issues and exploring community gardens as a potential solution.
- Paul met with ASES after school program staff at the beginning of the school year to strategize and plan around the YPAR project.
- Paul also met with a food services director who was interested in advocating for HHAK and making changes at Meadows Union.
- During the year, Paul and Chris brought their YPAR teams together, which led to the two youth groups realizing that they had overlapping interests and issues of focus. The Calexico high school students were able to use information and data that the Meadows Union students had produced last year. Paul also brought his youth to see the edible garden at Calexico High School.

Youth Recruitment

- Since this was the third year working on the same YPAR project, there were quite a few returning students. Some new students were younger siblings of students that had participated in the YPAR project in the previous year, so they already had some project knowledge.
- There were fourteen students total, ranging from 5th-8th grade, with eight returning students and six new students. Six out of the eight returning students were eighth graders who will be moving on to high school and thus not returning next year.

Issue & Research Question

- After introducing the YPAR process to the students at the beginning of the year, the youth came up with the idea of **addressing food insecurity issues, with a focus on advocating for community gardens.**
- The decision to focus on this issue came about because of a lack of community gardens in Imperial County, and the students wanted to address this gap.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- The students did research to find facts and figures about local agriculture, learning, for example, how profitable it is and that Imperial County acts as the "winter salad bowl of the U.S." despite there being a lack of food security and high obesity rates among local residents.
- Following on their research, the students identified community gardens as a potential way to address high food insecurity, high obesity rates, and low access to healthy foods in lower income areas. They thought that community gardens could provide healthier food, and the community work needed to sustain such a garden could facilitate the community also educating itself about the importance of health and nutrition in the process.

Recommendations & Final Products

- The students produced a final report on their findings, and they are in the process of creating a slide presentation and video to advocate for community gardens.
- Once the students are finished with these products, they will use them to promote awareness and advocate for community gardens in different cities in the county. The end goal of this project, continuing into next year, is presenting to City Council.

Action & Outcomes

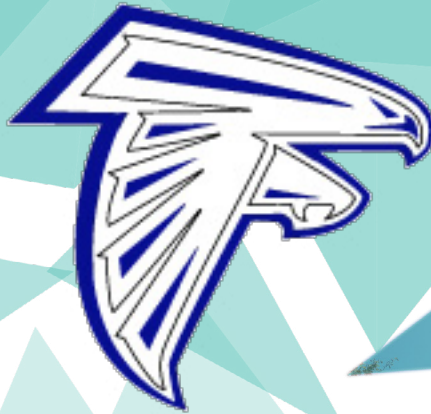
- Besides advocating for community gardens, the students also want to advocate for a farm-to school program at their school. As such, they have also been trying to connect the food service workers at school with local farmers, who are the relevant stakeholders for this kind of program. The students were able to use the final presentation from the previous year to recommend the farm-to-school program.

Next Steps & Program Sustainability

- There will be returning students who have worked on the YPAR project this year and want to keep the focus of the project on advocating for a community garden to address food insecurity.
- This year, Paul has initiated increasing youth engagement efforts at wellness education meetings. A new educator with a background in getting farm-to-school programs established was brought in to help facilitate meetings around applying for a farm-to-school program.
- After having conducted YPAR at the same site for several years, Paul feels ready to utilize YPAR in a different setting and is interested in working with high school youth, who are slightly older, at Southwest High. Next year, he plans to provide technical assistance and support to the teacher of a community service class at the middle school site and continue YPAR through that format. With the size of the class, it will be possible to divide students into four groups and potentially work on four different YPAR projects, depending on the students' interests. Ideally, Paul would like to provide one to two years of technical assistance and support to ensure the sustainability of YPAR at the current school site and then move on to a new high school site to seed YPAR.
- Paul has spoken to a graduate research lab that is interested in potentially partnering on the issues that Paul's students are working on and using the same YPAR framework to help orient their research.



Merced County Atwater High School's Food Access YPAR Project



Project Overview

Merced County UCCE staff began a YPAR project at Atwater High School, with Rosalinda Ruiz, Nutrition Education Coordinator, serving as the main adult ally and facilitator. Rosalinda worked with a classroom of 21 high school students on the connection between food access and childhood obesity.

Setting & Duration

- Atwater High School is located in the city of the same name, eight miles northwest of Merced, with a population of approximately 28,000.
- During the 2018-19 school year, Atwater High School served 1,860 students, with 2% identifying as African American, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 3% Asian, 0.5% Filipino, 76% Hispanic/Latinx, 0.4% Pacific Islander, 18% White, and 0.3% Multiracial. 11% of students were English Language Learners and 78% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Project Details & Partnerships

- The YPAR project began in January 2019, after UCCE staff met with the school principal, Mr. Johnson, and Mrs. Pimentel, whose class would be participating in the YPAR project.
- Once the students were introduced to YPAR, they decided to focus their project on analyzing food access and childhood obesity in their school and surrounding area.

Youth Recruitment

- Rosalinda worked with Mrs. Pimentel's classroom of 21 9th-12th grade students.

Issue & Research Question

- After brainstorming, the students were initially interested in two issue areas: better nutrition options and stress management skills.
- They ultimately decided to look at **how limited access to healthy food and the accessibility of fast food are connected to childhood obesity** in their local area, focusing on their school and its surroundings.

Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis

- For preliminary research, the students took pictures of the food advertising and offerings that they encountered in their local environment over the course of a weekend.
- Students were then divided into three groups, self-selecting which part of the project they wanted to focus on while also working together.
 - » The mapping team created a food access map using their school map and a map of their school surroundings, identifying nearby restaurants and fast food establishments.
 - » The interview team conducted interviews with other students on campus, captured these interviews on video, and also conducted an online survey around food access.
 - » The design team created the final presentation for the project, which was a slide show that included video and other visuals.
- Through an analysis of the healthy food options in and around their school, the group noted concerns about the type and quality of food available to students throughout the day on campus—particularly the unappealing food in their lunchroom and the unhealthy food options in the snack bar.

Recommendations & Final Products

- After analyzing the types of foods available to them throughout the day on campus and taking into account healthy foods they liked, the group suggested making smoothies, fresca fruit cups, and a DIY salad bar available at school to help address their concerns about healthy food access.
- Due to the project's tight timeframe at the end of the school year, the group was unable to coordinate a live presentation of their findings and recommendations with school staff and administration. Instead, they recorded their final presentation so it could be shared widely at the school and Mrs. Pimentel reached out to the principal and other school staff to view the video.

Action & Outcomes

- While the students have presented on their project and findings thus far, the YPAR project team will continue with a deeper analysis of the interviews and surveys conducted, and additional findings and recommendations will be drawn based on this analysis. The final presentation will also be further edited as necessary.

Next Steps & Program Sustainability

- The current YPAR project will continue into next year, using the data collected this year. Next year they hope to address this year's slow start and time limitations—which can also be related to launching a new YPAR project midway through the school year—so students have more time to work on the YPAR project.

Endnotes

ⁱ United States Department of Agriculture. (2018). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education Plan Guidance FY 2019. Retrieved from [SNAP-Ed Plan Guidance](#).

ⁱⁱ See FFY 2017's report, "Moving from Serving Youth to Engaging Youth: Youth-led Policy, Systems and Environmental Change Interventions in UC CalFresh Nutrition Education" and FFY 2018's report, "Building Together: Developing Key Partnerships to Support Youth-led Participatory Action Research in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming."

ⁱⁱⁱ Ardoin, N. M., Castrechini, S., & Hofstedt, M. K. (2014). Youth-community-university partnerships and sense of place: Two case studies of youth participatory action research. *Children's Geographies*, 12(4), 479-496.

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2008). Youth Participatory Action Research: A Pedagogy for Transformational Resistance. In J. Cammarota and M. Fine (Eds.), *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (1-9). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

London, J. K., Zimmerman, K., & Erbstein, N. (2003). Youth-led research and evaluation: Tools for youth, organizational, and community development. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2003(98), 33-45.

^{iv} University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. (2017). SNAP-Ed Toolkit: Obesity Prevention Interventions and Evaluation Framework. Retrieved from [SNAP-Ed Toolkit](#).

^v United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, the Association of SNAP Nutrition Education Administrators & the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research. (2016). SNAP-Ed Strategies & Interventions: An Obesity Prevention Toolkit for States. Retrieved from [SNAP-Ed Connection](#).



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