

# Strengthening Pathways

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Career Pathways in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming



## Acknowledgements

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### ***Contra Costa County***

UCCE staff members Eli Figueroa and Marisa Neelon, and the YPAR team at Hillview Junior High School.

### ***El Dorado County***

UCCE staff member Cailin McLaughlin and the Foothill Indian Education Alliance YPAR team.

### ***Imperial County***

UCCE staff members Chris Gomez Wong, Yu Meng, Rigoberto Ponce, and Arlene Silva, and the YPAR teams from Calexico High School's Eco-Garden Club and the Central Union High School District Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program.

### ***Madera County***

UCCE staff members Jessica Gil-Bautista and Elizabeth Lopez, and the YPAR team from James Madison Elementary School.

### ***Tehama County***

UCCE staff member Mario Monroy-Olivas and the YPAR team from Evergreen Middle School.

### ***Yolo County***

UCCE staff member Monica Drazba and the YPAR team from Esparto High School.

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## How to Use this Report

This report documents the work of six CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California (CFHL, UC) county programs that facilitated youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects as part of the Youth Engagement Initiative during Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023. 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. Highlighted here are diverse examples of YPAR in action within the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). In California, the name for the federal SNAP-Ed program is CalFresh Healthy Living.

After a brief introduction, this report profiles each YPAR project facilitated during FFY 2023. It concludes with an examination of lessons learned from these case studies, with a focus on use of the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit developed in FFY 2022 and continued piloting of a scaffolded approach to YPAR training and facilitation.

These case studies and their promising practices offer examples of what is possible as youth and program facilitators craft youth-led policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change interventions that fit the specific needs and circumstances of their unique communities. For resources on the YPAR process, please see <https://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu/initiatives/ye/ypar>.

## The Documentation Process

Information provided here was collected in several ways:

- Regular coaching calls and additional technical assistance conversations with individual county staff teams
- Post-project interviews and site visits with UCCE staff
- Statewide youth engagement conference calls that occurred every other month and were open to all CFHL, UC counties supporting youth engagement activities
- Youth-produced final reports, videos, and presentations
- Archived items and program documents from counties
- Extensive field notes

## The Youth Engagement Initiative & Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Launched in FFY 2016, CFHL, UC's Youth Engagement Initiative continues to explore 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 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 2024 SNAP-Ed Plan Guidance, pp. 18-20).<sup>i</sup> CFHL, UC recognizes that youth who are affected by PSE decisions should be involved in identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating change interventions themselves, in order to foster positive impacts. 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 2023, the CFHL, UC Youth Engagement Initiative continued to build upon its previous programmatic efforts<sup>ii</sup> and technical assistance. Given the continued variability of local conditions and needs, resource development, coaching, and training were tailored to fit in-person, online, and hybrid program delivery modalities. This report documents the work of UCCE staff members engaged in the CFHL, UC YPAR Community of Practice during FFY 2023, including their use of resources such as tightly scaffolded 6- and 12-session approaches to project-based learning and YPAR, as well as a Youth Career Pathways Toolkit for YPAR practitioners.

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.<sup>iii</sup> This approach helps achieve SNAP-Ed’s nutrition education and obesity prevention goals by positioning young people to become champions for PSE changes that promote healthy nutrition and physical activity in their communities, while also learning about healthy nutrition and physical activity. It is recognized by SNAP-Ed as a practice-tested PSE strategy that “aims to empower youth and achieve policy, systems, and environmental change efforts related to health, nutrition, and physical activity” by having young people “identify their own issues, problems, and possible solutions.”<sup>iv</sup> YPAR projects support youth to “engage in leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, strategizing skills, and service learning to address their target issue related to nutrition and physical activity.”<sup>v</sup>

Following are profiles of the FFY 2023 CFHL, UC YPAR projects and an examination of lessons learned from piloting of the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit and the scaffolded models for YPAR training and facilitation.

# Contra Costa County: Hillview Junior High School YPAR Project

## *Project Overview*

UCCE Contra Costa County staff launched a new YPAR project at Hillview Junior High School in Pittsburg during the second half of the school year. Marisa Neelon (Nutrition, Family, & Consumer Sciences Advisor) supported the project, and Eli Figueroa (UCCE Community Education Specialist) served as the primary adult ally and facilitator. They worked with a team of 10 young people. Eli had already been conducting direct education at the school for many years, so he took advantage of preexisting relationships with administration, teachers, and students to start this new project. The group met for an hour and a half twice a week and was enrolled in 4-H to utilize additional resources provided by that programming, such as healthy snacks for meeting participants.

## *Setting*

Hillview Junior High School is located in Pittsburg, a community with a population of roughly 76,000 people located in Eastern Contra Costa County.

## *Issue & Research Focus*

The youth team was particularly interested in water access and safety at their school. Their research focused on drinking water access.

## *Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis*

Youth conducted an environmental scan of water access at their school. They used the Water Access Scan Tool developed by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health's Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity to assess the availability and state of water fountains and other sources of free water. Eli helped the team digitize the scan tool, adapt it for their needs, and use tablets to collect their data.

## *Recommendations & Final Products*

After analyzing the scan data, the team mapped the location and status of all school water stations. They identified seventeen free water sources on their campus and recommended maintenance tasks such as replacing outdated and broken water stations, cleaning dirty fountains, and replacing expired filters.

## *Action & Outcomes*

Youth coordinated a year-end meeting with their principal to share project updates and present their assessment results before breaking for the summer. The principal was very interested in their findings since she was not previously aware of all the different water sources at their school. As a result of their work, the school replaced expired filters on its two water bottle refilling stations and the principal also invited the youth team to meet with district staff at the beginning of the next school year. The district is seeking youth input as they develop renovation plans for the school, so this is an opportunity for further engagement. Most of the youth participants will return in the fall and the group plans to conduct eight lead and copper water tests on the school's most frequented water sources. They hope to share the results with their principal and the district to further inform the school's renovation process.



# El Dorado County: Foothill Indian Education Alliance YPAR Project

## *Project Overview*

El Dorado County UCCE staff launched a new, 6-session YPAR project with community partners at Foothill Indian Education Alliance (FIEA) in Placerville. Cailin McLaughlin (UCCE Community Education Specialist) served as the primary adult ally and facilitator. FIEA serves indigenous youth of all ages, offering afterschool programming focused on cultural wealth, wellness, and academic success. UCCE staff have provided direct education and PSE support to FIEA since 2017. This project was part of FIEA's summer program.

## *Setting*

FIEA is located in Placerville, a Sierra foothills community with a population of roughly 11,000 people.

## *Issue & Research Focus*

UCCE's youth engagement programming with FIEA focused on native food access and fostering and celebrating food-related cultural knowledge. Youth invested substantial time and effort in the site's garden space and cooking classes and wanted to highlight this work. For their research, they explored local experiences with culturally-relevant crops and recipes.

## *Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis*

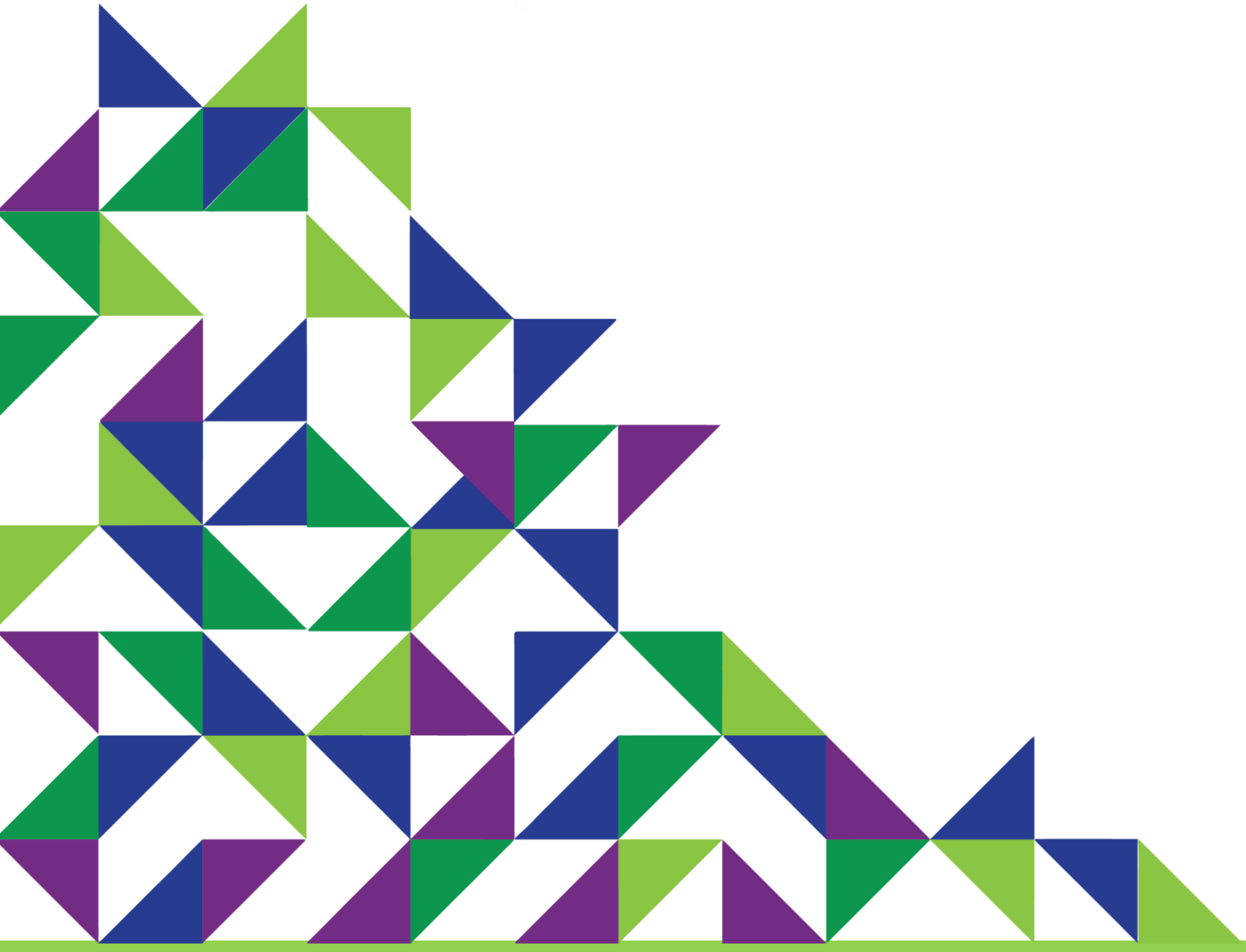
Youth interviewed their peers, parents, elders, and FIEA teachers to learn about their favorite plants in the garden and favorite recipes and offer a story-telling opportunity. Interviews were recorded on video at the garden site, although the group did not have enough time to analyze the data they collected for common themes.

## *Recommendations & Final Products*

Youth planned to combine clips from their interview footage to create a video, but they were not able to complete this task before the summer program ended.

*Action & Outcomes*

Youth took clear ownership over FIEA’s garden site and demonstrated their engagement, learning and care through their YPAR project. Adults were impressed by the youth-led work that occurred in the garden, the relationships they built, and the cultural knowledge compiled and employed. UCCE staff hope to continue this project in the coming year, to complete the data analysis and final product and engage additional young people who did not attend FIEA’s summer programming.





# Imperial County: Calexico High School's Eco-Garden Club YPAR Project and the Central Union High School District CTE YPAR Project

## *Project Overview*

For a fourth year, Imperial County UCCE staff sustained their partnerships with Calexico High School's Eco-Garden Club and Central Union High School District's (CUHSD) Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program. Chris Gomez Wong (UCCE Community Education Supervisor), Rigoberto Ponce (UCCE Community Education Specialist), and Arlene Silva (UCCE Community Education Specialist) served as the main adult allies and facilitators with support from Yu Meng (Youth, Family, and Community Advisor). Eco-Garden Club members continued to receive support from their school's Culinary Arts program and teacher Fernando Nuñez, while the CUHSD students were part of teacher Crystal Cortez's five CTE classes spread across three different high schools in El Centro. As in the previous year, UCCE staff formed an afterschool online YPAR group during the spring, recruiting representatives from each of their YPAR teams across Imperial County. This group of 15 youth met regularly to advance collective research, data analysis, and action efforts, and participants received financial compensation for their time.

## *Settings*

Calexico High School is located in the city of the same name on the United States-Mexico border, with a population of approximately 39,000 people. CUHSD is located in the city of El Centro, which is the main urban center in the Imperial Valley roughly nine miles north of Calexico. It has a population of approximately 44,000 people.

## *Issue & Research Focus*

Eco-Garden Club members continued efforts to expand their school garden and secure production space in their new greenhouse, while CUHSD youth were interested in issues related to their school meals program (e.g., low student participation levels, long lines for food, limited time and space for eating, etc.). However, with the formation of the afterschool online YPAR team—and the unexpected passing of a supportive Food Services Director—the combined participants from Calexico and CUHSD chose to focus their research on physical activity opportunities and walkability in their communities.

## *Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis*

Over the course of two weeks, members of the combined afterschool online YPAR team conducted walk audits in Calexico, El Centro, and Heber to explore opportunities for physical activity, active transportation, and mobility. Using the Our Voice Discovery Tool, youth collected photo images and written narratives of mobility assets and challenges they encounter on a daily basis. UCCE staff conducted a similar data collection effort with a group of senior citizens in Calexico, so youth were able to combine these different data sets for their analysis. A number of key concerns emerged from this intergenerational research effort—including a lack of bike lanes and cracked, blocked, and missing sidewalks across the region; conditions were particularly challenging in the unincorporated community of Heber.

## *Recommendations & Final Products*

The afterschool online YPAR team recorded a presentation over a slide deck highlighting key findings and photos from their intergenerational research, along with relevant data from the County's recently-released Community Health Assessment. Youth participants collaborated with some of the seniors to film their collective stories and share their experiences with this project. Together, they emphasized a need for bike lanes, well-maintained sidewalks, and improved lighting and shade.

## *Action & Outcomes*

UCCE staff held an in-person celebration at the end of the year with members of the afterschool online YPAR team and facilitated activities from the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit, including a tour of the Desert Research Station facilities and a speaker's panel focused on career opportunities related to their project activity. UCCE staff plan to continue this combined YPAR effort next year and hope to explore opportunities for intergenerational presentations and action involving members of the youth team and the seniors group.



# Madera County: James Madison Elementary School YPAR Project

## *Project Overview*

Madera County UCCE staff facilitated a full YPAR project at James Madison Elementary School focused on water access and appeal. This effort built upon the 6-session photovoice project conducted there last year. Jessica Gil-Bautista (UCCE Nutrition Program Educator) and Elizabeth Lopez (UCCE Nutrition Program Supervisor) served as the main adult allies and facilitators. They partnered with teacher Roberto Ival to involve all 24 students in his 5<sup>th</sup> grade class.

## *Setting*

James Madison Elementary School is located in the city of Madera in California's Central Valley, which has a population of approximately 66,000.

## *Issue & Research Focus*

The team chose to sustain the previous cohort's focus on water access and appeal for their research, with an emphasis on supporting the proper use and maintenance of newly purchased water stations installed at the end of the first semester. Youth were concerned that the new water stations were already getting dirty and being vandalized, just like the old ones.

## *Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis*

Through a school mapping activity, the team identified areas on campus and water stations that were used most frequently by students. Like the previous year's cohort, youth then used photovoice to document the conditions of the new water stations and their experiences. Their findings highlighted two water stations by the playground and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms with the highest levels of vandalism and misuse.

The team shared their preliminary findings with the school's lead custodian and also met with one of the long-standing janitors to explore his perspectives and concerns regarding the new water stations. The janitor shared ideas for how to keep the water stations from leaking and also identified the need to track when the filters need to be replaced, since the water stations themselves do not have any notification indicators.

## *Recommendations & Final Products*

Youth developed an educational video for their peers sharing their photos and narratives and highlighting how to properly use and take care of the water stations. They also made a recorded presentation with a slide deck for administrators, recommending rules and practices they could put in place to support the proper use and care of the new water stations (e.g., tracking their filter life).

## *Action & Outcomes*

The team shared their educational video and slide presentation with school administrators. To prevent the new water stations from being vandalized and mistreated in the future, youth recommended showing their educational video to all students at the beginning of each school year.



# Tehama County: Evergreen Middle School YPAR Project

## *Project Overview*

Tehama County UCCE staff launched a new, 12-session YPAR project at Evergreen Middle School. Mario Monroy-Olivas (UCCE Community Education Specialist) served as the primary adult ally and facilitator. Mario had been conducting direct education with Up4It and used lessons focused on improving the school environment to initiate the YPAR project. He partnered with health teachers Albert Estrada and Roxanne Akers to work with all 106 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at the school.

## *Setting*

Evergreen Middle School is located in rural northern Tehama County just outside of the town of Cottonwood (population of approximately 6,000).

## *Issue & Research Focus*

Youth explored physical activity opportunities and needs at their school and in their community.

## *Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis*

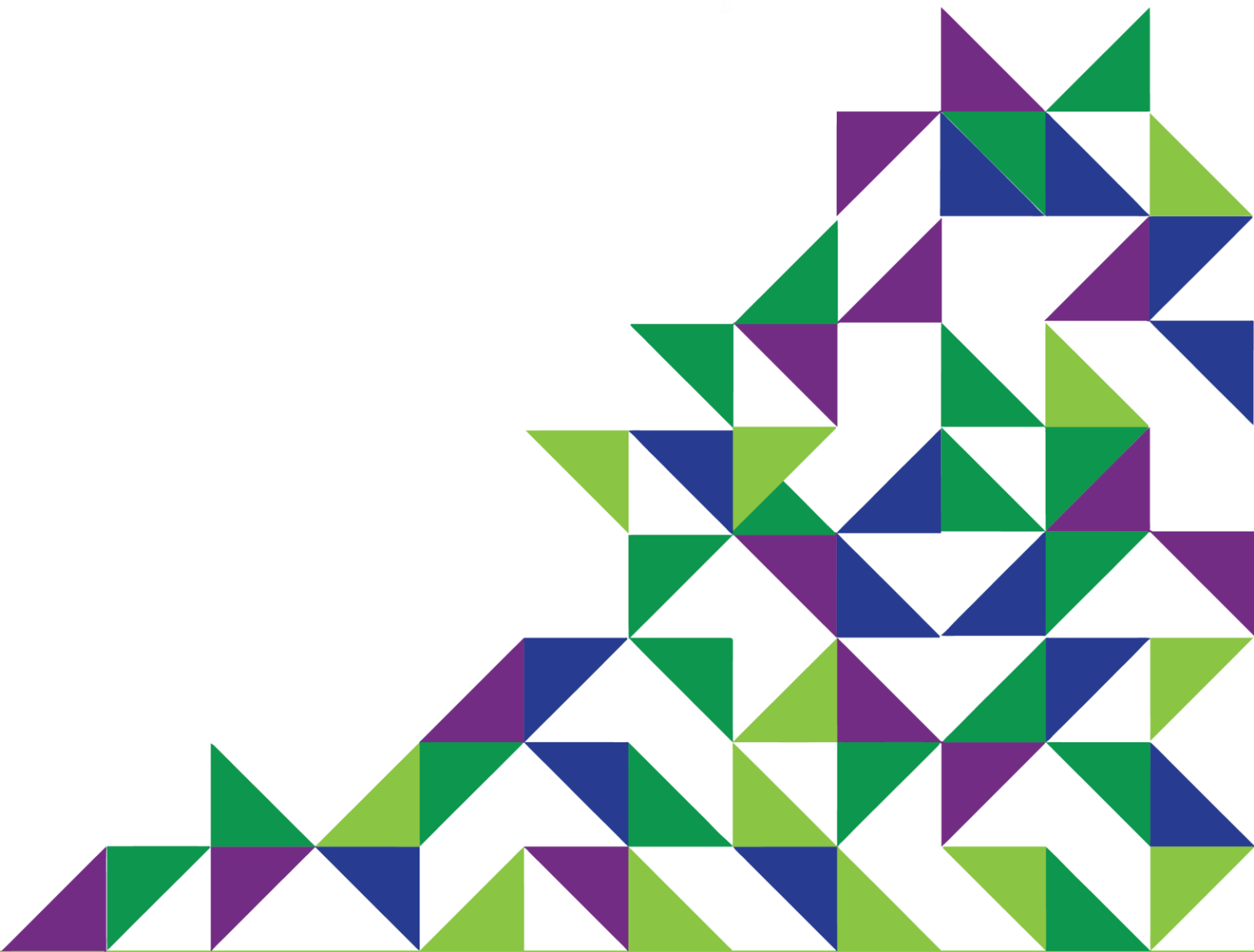
Youth participants assessed their environment utilizing publicly-available data and data they collected. The team reviewed publicly-available data related to local physical activity levels and childhood obesity rates. They also created a survey and administered it to their school peers. The young people discovered there are few locations in the community that support physical activity and, as a result, many students and their families rely on the school grounds for this. A majority of survey respondents wanted additional physical activity opportunities to be offered at their school during breaks, recesses, and physical education classes. They also noted there is currently only one working water fountain at their school.

## *Recommendations & Final Products*

Through their research, youth participants identified resource and equipment needs that could help students increase their physical activity at school. Their recommendations included painting playground stencils, fixing their broken water fountains, and purchasing new equipment like basketballs and a tennis net with tennis racquets. They shared their findings and recommendations through a presentation slide deck with infographics.

## *Action & Outcomes*

Representatives from the YPAR team presented their project and recommendations to their School Board at the end of the school year. Youth received new water bottles and some of the new equipment the youth team championed will be purchased for the coming school year. UCCE staff will help facilitate a playground stencil project on their campus in the fall with supplies donated by a local Home Depot.



# Yolo County: Esparto High School YPAR Project

## *Project Overview*

Yolo County UCCE staff launched a new, 6-session YPAR project with students at Esparto High School. Monica Drazba (UCCE Program Supervisor) served as the primary adult ally and facilitator. She partnered with teacher Jennifer Crerar to conduct the project with her ASB/Ag Leadership class. This student government class included all the student body leaders from each grade level at the school.

## *Setting*

Esparto High School is located in the town of Esparto, a rural community in unincorporated Yolo County with a population of approximately 4,000 people.

## *Issue & Research Focus*

The youth team examined physical activity opportunities and needs at Esparto Community Park, the main park in their town and a key public space located next to the high school. The Yolo County Parks Department was awarded a grant through Proposition 68 to make improvements at the park and they were seeking community input. The YPAR project was initiated to engage more young people in this process and provide the County with their feedback and priorities. Since a number of key decisions on this project had already been made, though, there were limited opportunities for meaningful youth input. Despite the challenges of the County's process, UCCE staff and the YPAR team focused on components of the park redesign they could actually influence, as well as elements that went beyond the scope of the Parks Department grant.

## *Research Method(s), Data Collection & Analysis*

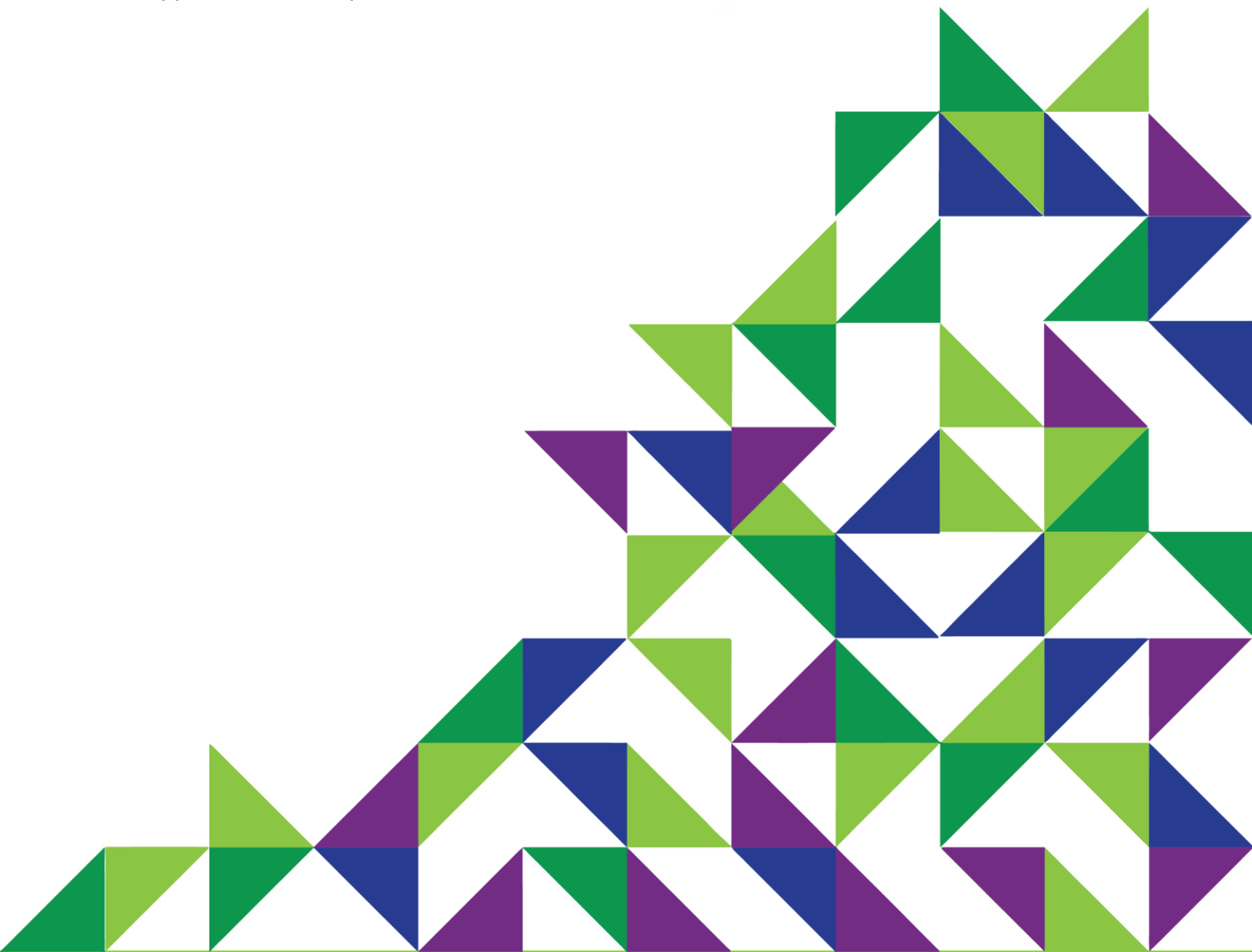
Youth performed a walk audit of the park space and its amenities, taking notes and photographs to document their observations. They then developed posters highlighting their initial findings and posted them around their school campus to ground-truth the data and collect responses and feedback from their peers. Research results highlighted the park as a key community resource and an important space for community gatherings, events, and relationship building.

## *Recommendations & Final Products*

Based on their research findings, youth participants highlighted a number of needed improvements at Esparto Community Park. In addition to shade structures and improvements to the playground—which were already included in the County’s plans for its grant funding—the team also recommended improvements to the park’s water fountains, benches and barbecue grills.

## *Action & Outcomes*

The youth team shared their findings and recommendations with their peers and teachers. They also shared their recommendations with the Esparto Citizens Advisory Committee, a group of residents that guides the County on planning and development opportunities in Esparto.





## Piloting the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit

Last year, SOE/CRC produced a Youth Career Pathways Toolkit to help YPAR participants recognize and articulate capacities they gain in ways that can support their employment and/or postsecondary education. This toolkit provides activities, tips, and resources for CFHL, UCCE staff and extenders facilitating YPAR projects, with the aim of helping youth translate what they're learning into building their own career pathways. In FFY 2022, SOE/CRC solicited input from Imperial County and Riverside County CFHL, UCCE staff, extenders, and youth by piloting activities. This year, SOE/CRC supported the continued use of the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit and integrated it into technical assistance, coaching and training efforts.

Imperial County UCCE staff used this resource again, facilitating a half-day, in-person symposium with their YPAR team at the end of the school year. Their goal was to help participants reflect on their individual and collective efforts and close out the year. The symposium was held at the UC Desert Research and Extension Center and involved youth representatives from the YPAR teams in Calexico and the Central Union High School District, along with Imperial County UCCE staff and a partner teacher. Youth toured the facilities to learn about the work that takes place at the site and the different jobs that are performed there. They also discussed career pathways with a panelist of speakers that included new UCCE staff members and a CTE teacher. The group finished the day with a healthy smoothie tasting. The symposium was very successful, and Imperial County UCCE staff plan to integrate these discussions and activities even earlier in their YPAR projects next year. For further details about Imperial County's YPAR efforts, please see their project profile located earlier in this report.

SOE/CRC provided an orientation to the toolkit and modeled some of its activities during the final workshop of this year's YPAR Summer Training Institute. This session also shared examples of the toolkit's use from CFHL, UCCE programming and helped participants generate their own plans. As a key component of this training workshop, Imperial County UCCE staff highlighted their use of the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit and shared their experiences facilitating activities through a youth symposium format. Twelve people participated in this session representing seven counties/county clusters—including one extender partner.

In FFY 2024, SOE/CRC will build upon lessons learned this year and continue to support use of the Youth Career Pathways Toolkit through technical assistance, coaching, and training efforts.

## Piloting Scaffolded Models for YPAR Training & Facilitation in FFY 2023

Documentation of CFHL, UC YPAR projects during FFY 2023 continued to focus on piloting a scaffolded approach to YPAR training and facilitation for nutrition educators and extenders who are most comfortable with direct instruction methods. Recognizing that newcomers to YPAR and youth leadership in PSE change could benefit from more tightly-framed, asset-based, culturally responsive youth engagement options with variable timeframes and predetermined parameters, the SOE/CRC team developed two additional “on-ramps” to meet these conditions:

- a 12-session series of activities for nutrition educators or extenders interested to implement more structured YPAR projects; and
- a 6-session series of activities derived from approved YPAR curricula that introduce PSE changes to build upon SNAP-Ed direct instruction efforts.

These scaffolded pathway options adapt facilitation of the Stepping Stones framework and related tools. Both reflect trade-offs—decreased levels of youth leadership and action—but provide a more bounded process in which facilitators and youth participants can learn about and experiment with some key YPAR values and processes. These resources aim to support educators who are newcomers to YPAR implementation while simultaneously supporting youth reflection on a significant shared experience related to healthy food access and/or physical activity.

In FFY 2023, three UCCE staff members employed these approaches and resources with three county programs:

- El Dorado County UCCE staff facilitated their first 6-session YPAR project as part of Foothill Indian Education Alliance’s summer program for indigenous youth;
- Tehama County UCCE staff facilitated their first 12-session YPAR project with all of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at Evergreen Middle School; and
- Yolo County UCCE staff facilitated their first 6-session YPAR project with the ASB/Ag Leadership class at Esparto High School.

UCCE staff members in one other county transitioned from facilitating a 6-session model last year to facilitating a full, year-long YPAR project, building on lessons learned:

- Madera County UCCE staff facilitated their first year-long YPAR project with a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class at James Madison Elementary School after facilitating a 6-session project at the school last year.

Project details and their accomplishments are provided in their individual profiles earlier in this report.

UCCE staff members' reflections on this ongoing pilot effort demonstrate support for previous findings documented in FFY 2020-2022.<sup>vi</sup>

- **Having distinct project framework options associated with YPAR encourages UCCE staff and partner interest.**
  - All UCCE staff members we interviewed consider several factors when determining which model is a fit for them and their partners, including
    - their level of experience and comfort with facilitating a youth-driven effort;
    - available project time (for them, their partners and youth);
    - project launch timing during the school year;
    - their partner's level of interest in a PSE change; and
    - the number of youth involved and whether participation is optional.
  - The 6-session and 12-session options allow UCCE staff and partner teachers to know from the beginning roughly how much time and effort will be needed for a project.
  - UCCE staff also recognize the flexibility of the timing, pacing and activities within each approach as critical for working effectively with partners and adapting projects to fit local needs.
  
- **Underscoring earlier observations, simplifying the process—and providing ready-made planning and facilitation resources—helped lower the bar to entry for newcomers while still exposing them to the YPAR approach, increasing their knowledge, experience, and confidence for future efforts.**
  - According to all UCCE staff members we interviewed, slide deck templates and other materials provided by SOE/CRC continue to provide a helpful base that UCCE staff and extenders can modify to fit their needs and align with their project's focus.
  - For some UCCE staff members, shorter models with greater adult decision making made a project easier and more feasible. However, for others, it was actually helpful to conduct a longer model or stretch sessions out to have more time to reflect on and improve pedagogical approaches and help youth work through the process.
    - Multiple UCCE staff members learned when and how to combine multiple activities into a single session or stretch a single activity out across multiple meetings with youth.
  - According to UCCE staff members we interviewed:
    - “The great thing about the 12-step model is that it’s really well organized. So, I love how easy it was for me to just, kinda, plug in and sometimes even do multiple sessions at the same time.”
    - The 6-session model can “give the school a taste of what it could be”.
    - “It was my first time facilitating these sessions and the approach and I did like what was chosen for the [6-session model] and how organized it was. It made the class preparation actually very smooth and it didn’t take a lot of time.”

- **UCCE staff continue to recognize some benefits of pairing a scaffolded approach with direct education curricula, to expose youth to PSE changes and lay a foundation for further exploration in a YPAR effort.**
  - Three out of the four county projects still combined these models with direct education and other programming, using it as a way to extend and enhance their work with young people and draw upon pre-existing youth learning, activities, and passions.
  
- **This year offered additional evidence that, as noted in previous reports, exposure to YPAR via scaffolded approaches may serve as a gateway to more in-depth, youth-led PSE change interventions.**
  - One UCCE staff member transitioned from facilitating a 6-session model last year to facilitating a full, year-long YPAR project this year.
    - Reflecting on their experience, they noted, “I felt more confident about delivering the longer model because I had a baseline of knowledge of what to do from doing the 6-session one.”
    - In their opinion, the 6-session model was quick and short, but they learned a great deal about leading a youth group from that initial experience. Building youth engagement, youth development and facilitation skills through the shorter model encouraged their shift to the extended approach.
    - They became familiar with some curriculum materials through their 6-session project, which translated to their extended YPAR project. This increased their confidence to conduct these and other activities.
    - After facilitating a full YPAR project, they described the longer YPAR model as “more thorough,” noting it gave them more time to build in key discussions and context. This allowed them to explore their topic at a deeper level and spend more time discussing possible solutions and taking action, which made a big difference in the participation and engagement levels of their youth leaders.
      - They also noted that “with the longer model there was more time for fun” as well as more room for making and learning from mistakes (e.g., trying things out, reflecting on them, and then applying the lessons learned to future activities).
  - According to other UCCE staff members we interviewed:
    - “Obviously, doing it once has calmed the nerves for some of the lessons, and I can know what to expect coming forward. And also, I know what to, kind of, adapt for the students, too, depending on what they want to do.”
    - “I feel comfortable adapting YPAR to different scenarios.”
    - “I do feel more confident but have room for improvement.”
    - “Using a shorter model the first time delivering the series was a good approach...Mainly if the community partners are unsure and want to try it, I think it’s a great approach for them to see all the

positive impacts and then work it into their curriculum or programming for the following year.”

FFY 2023 UCCE staff members’ reflections also provided additional insights and recommendations beyond previously documented findings.

- **UCCE staff made the following recommendations to colleagues planning to pursue a 6-session, 12-session or full YPAR project.**
  - Four out of the five UCCE staff members we interviewed noted the value of participating in individualized technical assistance and coaching calls with SOE/CRC staff to help them plan for and reflect on activities, solicit feedback, and brainstorm approaches. These conversations can sometimes surface suggestions and ideas that go beyond the toolkit’s written content, making them a valuable source of additional guidance.
  - All UCCE staff members we interviewed emphasized the value of learning from their peers to explore what they did, how they approached each activity, what modifications they made, etc. Consider shadowing others who are facilitating a project to see what it looks like in practice.
  - Set aside sufficient time to become familiar with the different approaches and their respective materials. Just like with other SNAP-Ed curricula UCCE staff utilize, it takes time to read through and process all the content and figure out which approach is the better fit for one’s youth and adult partners. This can be aided by attending and/or reviewing recordings from the workshops of the YPAR Summer Training Institute (recordings available at <https://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu/initiatives/ye/ypar>) and Youth Engagement Leadership Calls (recordings available at <https://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu/yetrainingsresources>). Additionally, two UCCE staff members found it easier to engage with a printed copy of the Stepping Stones YPAR toolkit (available for downloading at [https://ypar.cfcl.ucdavis.edu/OurApproach.html#stepping\\_stones](https://ypar.cfcl.ucdavis.edu/OurApproach.html#stepping_stones)) rather than the digital PDF version, noting that content that may have seemed confusing online made more sense once they looked at the physical copy of the materials.
  - The 6-session model can be spread out across more than just six meetings with youth. This can allow for more time on certain activities when needed, to accommodate shifting schedules and capacity-levels.
  - At this stage of the pandemic recovery period, in-person meetings seem to be more effective than online meetings for maintaining youth participation. In-person meetings allow for informal check-ins with youth.
  - Identify strong partner teachers and extenders to help set projects up for success from the beginning.
- **UCCE staff identified additional resources that could aid future YPAR facilitators.**
  - Some UCCE staff and their partners found it difficult to relate the 6-session and 12-session models—which contain only six or twelve distinct

activities/lessons, respectively—to the nine Stepping Stones of our YPAR framework, each of which contains multiple activities and resources. They indicated it could be valuable to design a visual that clarifies this relationship, while also highlighting where adult allies might need to make decisions and where there is room for youth decision-making and agency.

- UCCE staff noted it could be helpful to collect, organize, and share the modified versions of the slide deck templates they and their peers create to preserve this work as a resource for others.

Reflections on this scaffolded approach to YPAR training and facilitation continue to be promising. Lessons learned from this year’s documentation work will continue to shape collaboration, technical assistance and resource development for YPAR projects in the upcoming year.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2022). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education Plan Guidance FY 2022. Retrieved from <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/program-administration/guidance-and-templates>

<sup>ii</sup> 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"; FFY 2018's report, "Building Together: Developing Key Partnerships to Support Youth-led Participatory Action Research in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming"; FFY 2019's report, "Growing Capacity: Identifying professional development and organizational supports needed to facilitate youth participatory action research (YPAR) in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming"; FFY 2020-21's report, "Staying Connected: Sustaining & Expanding Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Efforts in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming During the COVID-19 Pandemic"; and FFY 2022's report, "Meeting Youth Where They Are: Conducting In-Person, Online and Hybrid Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming." Reports available at <https://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu/initiatives/ye/ypar>.

<sup>iii</sup> 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.

<sup>iv</sup> 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 <https://snapedtoolkit.org/interventions/programs/youth-participatory-action-research-projects-ypar/>

<sup>v</sup> 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 <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/library/materials/youth-participatory-action-research-projects-ypar>

<sup>vi</sup> For previous years' lessons-learned, see FFY 2020-21's report, "Staying Connected: Sustaining & Expanding Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Efforts in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming During the COVID-19 Pandemic"; and FFY 2022's report, "Meeting Youth Where They Are: Conducting In-Person, Online and Hybrid Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California Programming." Reports available at <https://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu/initiatives/ye/ypar>.