

Campaign for Children

#FundYouthNYC

Testimony of
Members of the #FundYouthNYC Youth Committee
Campaign for Children

Presented to the New York City Council
Committee on Finance

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2021
EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARINGS

The #FundYouthNYC Youth Committee has over 100 members, all New York City youth and youth workers who would be negatively impacted by cuts to summer programs. When COVID-19 hit, our programs adapted quickly and pivoted from in-person programming to remote engagement for youth and families and are currently offering online tutoring support, art and recreation programming, behavioral health care and additional supports through grab-and-go meal provision and grocery delivery.

As these providers were in the middle of ramping-up planning to continue and expand these efforts in summer 2020, Mayor de Blasio announced the Fiscal Year 2021 Executive Budget, eliminating funding for all summer Beacon, Cornerstone, COMPASS/SONYC, and SYEP programming. These cuts will leave nearly 175,000 New Yorkers below the age of 24 with little to no supports and activities this summer and would have devastating impacts, youth, families, and our communities.

As young people and those who serve them (many of us who benefited from these same summer programs as youth), we stand united in calling for a comprehensive youth recovery plan for Summer 2020. The Mayor and all of our elected leaders—at the City, State, and Federal levels—must ensure that families have the summer programs they need as part of our City’s broader COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Because we believe the voices of young people and their adult allies should be centered in this discussion, we have compiled our testimonies here:

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Without summer internships or programs, we don't have anything to look forward to in the summer. These opportunities could be what determines what future career you want to pursue. We go to schools expecting to learn about history, but we need summer programs to learn more about ourselves. - Anthony Cooper, 18

Summer programs offer kids and teens an opportunity to do something new. For kids, they get to experience new things, meet new people, and make friends. For teens, they gain job experiences they need in order to apply for part-time employment and it keeps them from doing reckless things and to help provide for their families. Everyone is already struggling, so let's help our youth feel engaged this summer! - Angel Arias, 17.

When I was 14, I got accepted into SYEP and for 3 amazing years worked at Dominicanos USA in the Bronx. This experience gave me a chance to work with passionate professionals that inspired me every day, and now I would like to pursue a career as an immigration attorney so I can help open up opportunities for other people. Even if it is just one person at a time, I have learned that it really does make a difference. This summer, I was really looking forward to a new placement, in order to broaden my horizons and try something new. Even with social distancing in place, SO MANY of our NYC nonprofits are doing amazing work SAFELY, and are committed to providing life-changing experiences for youth through SYEP and other DYCD summer programs. They stand ready to train, mentor, and inspire tens of thousands of us. Don't let this be a lost summer for youth, where we just sit around watching TV not learning anything. We WANT these opportunities, and if you give them to us, we WON'T let you down. - Rashiel, 18

During the summer, Goddard Riverside's Community Arts program partners with Beacon, SYEP and others to provide intensive arts education for youth in our community. The funding has disappeared but the students, the educators and the need are still there, and stronger than ever. - Amanda Hopper

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Every year since 2009 we have run a Peer Education worksite in the Bronx for young women, and every year the evaluations they complete share how much they learned about sexual and reproductive health, substance abuse and related issues that they can apply to their own lives and share with peers - and maybe most importantly, what it meant to them to work in a respectful and creative environment that encouraged them to step up and be leaders. They gain confidence, public speaking skills and work experience that changes their sense of their opportunities moving forward. SYEP is opportunity! We need it now more than ever, and we can create what is needed for this summer, if funded!! - Joy Leonard, New Settlement Program for Girls & Young Women

The experience I gained during my employment in SYEP last year was unparalleled. Not only did I gain new friends and contacts, but also great experiences and resources. - Thierno Diallo

Day One Summer Peer Leader Institute was eye opening. The summer program gave me a safe space learning about preventing abuse and helped me gain skills to help my peers through their issues. It was a program that opened my eyes to new careers and helped me learn not just about social work but myself and my own needs better. - Gursimran Kaur

I used to be part of SYEP, which allowed me to gain experience. I also had many opportunities and resources from it. - Rashiel, 18

People can get rid of stress and anxiety with activities in summer camps, and that is why it is so important to keep them. - Maria Lima

To take away summer programming is taking away opportunities for growth, education, and connection to youth who need it the most. The majority of folks who benefit from these programs are black and brown youth *and* their families. Why take those meaningful experiences away from populations that are already set up to fail by the overarching white supremacist structures that have been created / upheld by people in positions of power (people who cut funding on summer youth). Know better, be better, do better. I stand in solidarity with the youth and families who have already been greatly affected by this. - Daniella Pajonas

Every day we see the powerful impact of youth programs. They're needed now more than ever. - Trish Anderton

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The youth deserve the right to gain life and work experience as much as adults. Don't take away this opportunity. - Torian Yancey

I was in summer youth when I was younger. It allowed me to gain experience working with students, but also help my mom with the bills. - Angel Figaro

Work-Based learning is one of the most important models to Youth Development today. We know that our students have some of the most valuable learning experiences outside of the classroom. Please remember, youth are the future of our country. Great education begins with access! - Joanna Ferrell

SYEP gave me the first official work experience I had. With this job, I gained the knowledge needed to continue on and eventually begin working in Youth Development. I don't know where I would be in life if this opportunity wasn't given to me so early on. Please don't take this opportunity away from the youth! - Ashley Vargas Ball

Since this terrible virus has come to the USA it has done nothing but disappoint millions of people. Not only have lives been lost but everyone else's lives have stopped and cutting these programs is going to do nothing but disappoint more people. - Zanay

SYEP was my first experience in the work field. This is a great and important opportunity for the youth that shouldn't be taken away. - Anabel M., 18

Funded programs for youth helped me gain the experience I needed and establish new connections. I believe these programs are crucial for youth starting out in the work world and beneficial to those who are in search of something new. - Mia, 24

Budget cuts would not only negatively impact my life but others' as well. This is an opportunity for the youth to indulge in healthy habits and learn what it means to work hard and to actually learn more about themselves. SYEP has given me the platform to know and refine myself to branch out and to voice myself and others. - Garcia, 21

Summer programming gives the young people I work with great social connections, improved self-esteem and important professional skills. Don't take it away from them! - Jamila, Day One

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Summer programs are a necessity to keep kids my age active during the summer. Already with online school kids are restless and bored, and this will only be increased if programs are cut over the summer. We need to stay engaged this summer! - Alexandra Tiger, 16

Summer Programs have positively impacted my life and they have shaped who I am as a person. Summer is the time when youth begin to learn more and explore different career paths. Summer programs lets youth connect and engage and helps them learn so many different skills. - Mehribon A., 16

SYEP was my first opportunity to earn a wage. It taught me discipline and kept me out of trouble. It now almost 20 years later helps me to offer the same opportunities to the youth from various communities. - Debbie Louis

My summers were always spent working a SYEP position; I was able to gain meaningful job experience and earn some money. My peers and I all took advantage of learning/working opportunities for young people and I cannot imagine NYC summer without it! - Damala, Girls for Gender Equity

Summer programming provides a well needed respite from the daily school traumas young people experience while also providing learning, fun, connection and healthy activities to combat summer learning loss and health concerns. - Sasha, youth social worker

Summer programs provide experience that is needed for the future. - Yessii, 20

SYEP and summer programming is critical for students, especially in underserved communities. I have seen hundreds of students participate over the past 15 years and they all have shared positive experiences, built networks of support, and increased their work readiness. - Jose

Working as a youth worker when I was younger (starting at summer camps as a counselor in training at 13 years old) helped pave the way for the work I am doing now as a youth service provider. Without that experience, I might not be where I am, doing the work I am doing today! - Nicole, Girls for Gender Equity

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I have witnessed how SYEP has helped youth access not only financial resources, but also essential life skills such as socio-emotional coping strategies, creativity, problem-solving, decision-making and leadership. There are few things our youth look forward to more than when that application goes live. - Lourdes

Summer programs are an investment that provides opportunities to youth to explore careers and interests beyond their communities that build future leaders. Shuba - New Settlement Apartments

SYEP is an investment in the future. We can't afford NOT to fund SYEP. - Sanda, YVote/Next Generation Politics

Summer camps and summer employment both lead to wonderful opportunities for youth to stay active and engaged as well as gaining valuable work experience. Many SYEP's have become employees at the places they worked at as teenagers. - Anonymous

DYCD summer programs have provided opportunities, experiences, and long lasting relationships for young people. These programs help us get "ahead of the curve", offering career and job readiness training, coupled with social/emotional counseling, and a variety of resources. - Jonelle Williams

SYEP has been extremely useful in providing youth with wonderful work experience, mentoring, and a chance to learn about functioning well in the workplace. The program has helped to provide many youth with income to help both themselves and their families during the summer. - N.A.

Summer programs provide an opportunity for young people to network and develop new skills. It's an opportunity for youth to be exposed to new environments. Summer youth programs help shape the future leaders of our community. - A.M

I was in summer youth when I was younger. It helped shape me into the professional that I am now. - Manny

This year was gonna be my opportunity to join the summer youth program. - Michelle