

# VOICES OF CHANGE: The Summit County Youth Coalition Story



## ***Building What's Next***

SCYC is carrying the momentum and passion that took place from 2023-25 as the coalition looks forward. Youth voice has been elevated, but the work is far from finished. This final installment of this series of research briefs offers a vision of what's next: sustaining the work, expanding its reach and helping others build their own foundations for youth-directed change.

## **RESEARCH BRIEF**

### **Deeper integration of youth voice into systems**

The future of this work relies on deeper integration into systems so that youth voice is not something special or exceptional but expected. This work is about shifting power which means we must create formal youth councils in every district, with clear roles, funding and decision-making ability. It means embedding youth representatives into the everyday governance of schools and community organizations. It also means investing in leadership pipelines where students aren't just trained to lead but are trusted to be the leaders.

Our SCYC youth have already outlined a future that focuses on equity and shared power. They've expressed a desire to co-create solutions around curriculum, school discipline, postsecondary access and overall well-being. Their visions are clear.

#### ***Student voice:***

*"I'm going to try and speak out more, as well as find confidence in myself. I'm going to take the initiative more and start acting more like a leader."*

### **Expansion across Summit County**

One of the most exciting developments throughout the work with the SCYC is the opportunity to introduce the model to other districts in Summit County.

#### **The blueprint can be simplified for those just starting out.**

- Just start listening.
- Host youth story circles.
- Partner with trusted community groups to find and invite students into the process.
- Respect the youth's time with stipends and food. (This isn't just an incentive, it is a sign of mutual respect for their time and effort.)
- Meet regularly.
- Act on what the students share.
- Be consistent.

This work doesn't require a huge budget, but it does require commitment. Start with what you have. Build relationships before agendas and trust the wisdom that young people bring to the table (even when it may challenge your own assumptions).

#### **Get started!**

- Contact us:  
330.535.8833  
[abowman@seisummit.org](mailto:abowman@seisummit.org)
- Build real relationships.
- Secure simple and flexible funding.
- Create a dedicated environment.
- Center youth voice in the decision-making structure of the program.
- Set up partnership agreements with schools to ensure buy-in.
- Foster an atmosphere that allows youth to launch and grow system-changing initiatives.
- Start small and build with intentionality.
- Track and report progress.
- Have fun!



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## Sustaining the work

The SCYC has never been a program, it's a culture. And cultures are sustained by what we value. If we value youth voice, we must fund it, build around it and be held accountable to it.

SEI and its partners will continue to co-create with youth, share what we're learning and advocate for policy and practice that elevates student leadership at every level. This work isn't about creating another committee. It's about building a generation of young people in this community and beyond who know that their voices matter. They know it matters because they've seen the change that comes from it.

### Student voice:

*"I plan to articulate my thoughts and ideas much more clearly, even when I'd rather stay quiet the whole time."*

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