

# EMPOWERING YOUTH, EXPLORING JUSTICE



## *Mission:*

EYEJ drives social justice reform by empowering young people to advocate for change.

## *Vision:*

An equitable and inclusive world.



## EYEJ Youth Council Executive Summary

EYEJ Youth Council first convened in 2017. That year, 19 Cleveland youths ages 15 to 25 interviewed for and were accepted into the program. Then, as now, the group's purpose was to give young people a place to assemble and brainstorm solutions to the injustices, challenges, and other obstructions they and their communities face every day.

Through collaboration with Partnership for A Safer Cleveland and with support from the Larry Doby Youth Fund through the Cleveland Indians, EYEJ Youth Council members were trained in leadership, public speaking, teamwork, research, and programming and fundraising. Their Cleveland-specific focus areas were toxic stress, police-youth relationships, and independent living skills (youth independence).

In April 2018, the Council prepared and presented data, research, and storytelling to civic, sports, and business leaders, including members of the Cleveland Indians and Cleveland Police. In a petition for \$140,000, they made proactive suggestions to improve the lives of youth in Cleveland and set themselves and others up for long-term success.

Their work did not go unnoticed. The 2018 presentation generated numerous recommendations from professionals interested in the Council's work and \$20,000 in support from the Tegna Foundation and individual donors. That summer, the EYEJ Youth Council made at least 14 appearances in local news media, receiving coverage by The Plain Dealer, WKYC, Ideastream, and others. The group also presented to the U.S. Attorney General of Northeast Ohio and at the Cleveland Police Commission's annual meeting. Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown invited the Council to Washington, D.C., to meet and share its work with government dignitaries.

2019 saw several more notable accomplishments. The EYEJ Youth Council remained a steady presence in the local news, as founder Mai Moore and council members Chantal Brown, Maranda Prial, Ron Miller, Diamond Bottoson, and Mallory Wilks appeared in numerous TV reports and features. The Council itself created multiple showcase videos for WKYC and other outlets through the Tegna Foundation. The group also held several public events, serving both to raise funds and generate public awareness. Member Chantal Brown received the Young Adult Award from The Soul of Philanthropy, Cleveland.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the EYEJ Youth Council to shift focus. Of primary concern in 2020 and 2021 is the so-called "Digital Divide," the startling lack of access many families – predominantly African-American – have to reliable, high-speed internet. Even as the school year proceeds in virtual space, EYEJ has found that in some Cleveland neighborhoods, as many as 50 percent of households do not have access to the broadband internet, students need to attend classes and complete schoolwork.

The Council strives to correct this injustice by implementing various new programs and initiatives to raise awareness and funds. In 2020, the youth raised over \$20,000 for the #Empower giving campaign to support more detailed and accurate research on Cleveland's broadband accessibility and fund a stipend program for students involved in the project. The Council has met with policymakers capable of acting on the group's recommendations and working with local media to educate the public and create content highlighting the Council's efforts.

Over the summer of 2020, the EYEJ Youth Council conducted its work virtually. Some 30 young adults, including high school and college students, worked anywhere from two to 10 hours a week, organizing and holding digital meetings, protests, exhibits, and fundraising events centered on the issue of connectivity in Cleveland. Through this work, the students fulfilled the broader mission of EYEJ by learning to formulate opinions, developing critical thinking skills, and mastering the art of speaking in public. The students also completed a survey at the end of the summer, further assisting EYEJ by making recommendations on how the Youth Council and other EYEJ programs can be improved, especially in light of the pandemic. Bridging the Digital Divide remains the group's top priority for the remainder of 2020 and into 2021.

## Additional Info

EYEJ Youth Council 2020 Statement - On Digital Divide

<http://eyej.org/youth-council/we-cannot-charge-the-future-if-we-are-not-plugged-into-the-present/>

We Are EYEJ Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCUjEyQxRj4&feature=youtu.be>

EYEJ



Youth  
Council



Address: 2515 Jay Ave., Suite 101, Cleveland, OH 44113  
Tel. No.: (216) 200-7042

hello@eyej.org  
www.eyej.org