

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Positive Youth Development Institute  
DIVISION OF EXTENSION  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



## BY YOUTH FOR YOUTH (BYFY) AWARDS \$26,130 TO LOCAL YOUTH PROGRAMS

*High school leaders review and award City and County grants that will benefit youth-led organizations and youth programs in Dane County.*

**MADISON, Wis. (May 5, 2026)** - In April 2026, the By Youth for Youth committee awarded \$26,130 to 9 local youth programs and projects. By Youth For Youth is a committee of Dane County high school students that make local investment decisions to support youth-led programs and projects in Dane County. The BYFY program is a collaborative effort between UW-Madison Extension's Positive Youth Development Institute, the Dane County Youth Commission, the City of Madison, and United Way of Dane County. Funding for BYFY is provided through a combination of City and County funds, with a special thank you to the Madison Civics Club for awarding the BYFY program with a generous endowment in support of continuous youth leadership.

This year's BYFY cohort included 24 Dane County high school students from 9th to 12th grade, spread across the County from 11 different high schools including Belleville, Cambridge, Edgewood, Madison Country Day, Middleton, MMSD (East, La Follette, Memorial, West), Sun Prairie, and Waunakee.

By Youth For Youth's chosen funding priorities for 2026 focused on addressing mental health (anxiety, depression, suicide ideation & self-harm), positive experiences inside and outside of school (belonging, equity & inclusion, bullying), food security (food access, nutrition for low-income youth), immigration (accessing seNices & resources), sexual assault prevention (accessing seNices & resources), and climate change.

### Funding highlights:

- Wisconsin Heights School District: BYFY is proud to fund the "Closegap Initiative", supporting the training and implementation of a daily digital check-in for students that enables early mental health intervention in school settings.
- Oregon High School: BYFY is proud to fund the "Run-Walk for Sexual Assault Awareness Month" event hosted by the Imagine Club, a youth-led educational fundraiser supporting survivors of sexual violence and proceeds are donated to local organizations in Dane County.
- Rooted, Inc: BYFY is proud to fund the "Rooted in Community Gardens" project, where youth update and fix existing garden beds that are used for local families to grow their own personal produce.

### Full List of Funded Organizations and Programs:

- Dairyland Dancing Diamonds: "Nourish & Flourish Initiative"
- Wisconsin Heights School District: "Mental Health Closegap Initiative"

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- Rooted Inc: "Rooted in Community Gardens"
- East High School's WA VE Club: "Menstrual Equity Project"
- Oregon High School's Imagine Club: "Run-Walk for Sexual Assault Awareness Month"
- Cardea: "American Heart Association & National Alliance on Mental Illness SK Run"
- Elver Park Neighborhood Center: "Team Building Through Art Experiences"
- Meadowood Neighborhood Center: "Plates with Purpose"
- MTZ Charitable Organization: "Planted with Purpose"

**Supporting partner statements:**

"By Youth For Youth gives the next generation of community leaders an opportunity to make a real impact at a young age. These inspiring teens are learning how to collaborate, communicate effectively and accelerate results, all in order to help more people and change more lives. We are proud to convene Dane County's up and coming thought leaders." - *Renee Moe, President & CEO of United Way of Dane County*

"By Youth For Youth is a one-of-a-kind youth program and the City of Madison is proud to partner with them. BYFY puts decision-making power in the hands of young people in real and structural ways, allowing participants to fund other youth programs, preparing them to be community leaders and participate in policy-making and funding decisions. BYFY supports young people in understanding and exercising the power they have to better their communities." - *Satya Rhodes-Conway, Mayor of Madison*

"We are honored to provide funding to By Youth For Youth each year. This program provides Dane County high school students the experience of allocating tangible funds that positively impact youth county-wide. It's a unique and wonderful experience for youth interested in making a difference in their communities." - *Melissa Agard, Dane County Executive*

**2025-2026 BYFY Committee Members:**

Zoha Adnan	Madison Country Day
Hannah-Kay Amuzu-Gassou	Edgewood High School
Fatima Romero Alvarado	Madison La Follette High School
Amogh Avadhani	Middleton High School
Brandon Ballweg	Waunakee High School
Brooke Ballweg	Waunakee High School
Ruth Bawithadim	Sun Prairie West High School
Aditya Behara	Middleton High School
Jailen Clark	Madison La Follette High School
Denise Espirito Santo Dias	Waunakee High School
Sophia Downs	Cambridge High School
Hanshika JaiPravinKumar	Sun Prairie West High School
Angelina Li	Waunakee High School
Sharon Medina	Madison West High School
Andry Negovani	Madison Memorial High School
Kobe Ni	Waunakee High School
Christian Rubio Robledo	Madison La Follette High School
Frances Schaller-Davis	Madison East High School
Jinal Shah	Middleton High School
Lily Shapiro	Madison West High School

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Evelyn Soukup  
Jill Thompson  
Faith Waefler  
Yesenia Naomy Villagomez

Waunakee High School  
Cambridge High School  
Belleville High School  
Madison La Follette High School

**By Youth For Youth Staff:**

Nathan Beck  
Taylor Seale  
Michelle Van Asten  
Bonnie Erickson

City of Madison  
UW-Madison Extension  
United Way of Dane County  
Dane County Youth Commission





Positive Youth Development Institute  
DIVISION OF EXTENSION  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



## 2025 - 2026 By Youth For Youth Funding Recommendations

We seek your approval of 9 funding recommendations totaling \$26,130 from the By Youth For Youth (BYFY) Committee.

By Youth For Youth is a committee of Dane County high school students that make investment decisions to support youth-led programs and projects in Dane County. BYFY members identify issues impacting youth in Dane County, establish funding priorities, review grant proposals, and recommend funding from County and City grants to support projects developed and implemented by youth to serve youth. The BYFY program is a collaborative effort between UW-Madison Extension, the Dane County Youth Commission, the City of Madison, and United Way of Dane County.

3 sponsors made \$26,130 available for investment:

- Dane County Youth Commission (\$14,630)
- United Way of Dane County (\$6,000)
- City of Madison, Office of Community Services (\$5,500)

In past years, a portion of the funding would be reserved for programming expenses for weekly meetings. Because the 2024/25 BYFY program was held in a hybrid format as well as from generosity from the City of Madison to create an operational fund, 100% of the funding is going towards the selected youth programs and initiatives in Dane County.

The BYFY students worked together to identify and select the priorities below for funding in this year's round of investments, spread the word among youth groups about the availability of funds, and evaluated and deliberated funding requests to recommend funding. A total of 43 projects across Dane County applied for financial support; with the requests totaling \$125,505 (compared to last year, 23 projects applied for a BYFY grant with requests totalling \$66,170). Schools, community centers, non-profit organizations and individual youth were among the applicants.

2025 - 2026 BYFY Funding Priorities:

- Mental Health (*Anxiety, Depression, Suicide Ideation & Self-Harm*)
- Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School (*Belonging, Equity & Inclusion, Bullying*)
- Food Security (*Food Access, Nutrition for Low-Income Youth*)
- Immigration (*Accessing Services & Resources*)
- Sexual Assault (*Prevention, Accessing Services & Resources*)
- Climate Change

The attached list of 9 recommended projects totaling \$26,130 align with these priorities and will directly impact youth, their peers, and their families in their community.

## **2025 - 2026 By Youth For Youth Members**

Zoha Adnan	Madison Country Day
Hannah-Kay Amuzu-Gassou	Edgewood High School
Fatima Romero Alvarado	MMSD La Follette High School
Amogh Avadhani	Middleton High School
Brandon Ballweg	Waunakee High School
Brooke Ballweg	Waunakee High School
Ruth Bawithadim	Sun Prairie West High School
Aditya Behara	Middleton High School
Jailen Clark	MMSD La Follette High School
Denise Espirito Santo Dias	Waunakee High School
Sophia Downs	Cambridge High School
Hanshika JaiPravinKumar	Sun Prairie West High School
Angelina Li	Waunakee High School
Sharon Medina	MMSD West High School
Andry Negovani	MMSD Memorial High School
Kobe Ni	Waunakee High School
Cassy Puntney	Sun Prairie West High School
Christian Rubio Robledo	MMSD La Follette High School
Frances Schaller-Davis	MMSD East High School
Jinal Shah	Middleton High School
Lily Shapiro	MMSD West High School
Evelyn Soukup	Waunakee High School
Jill Thompson	Cambridge High School
Faith Waefler	Belleville High School
Yesenia Naomy Villagomez	MMSD La Follette High School

## **2025 - 2026 By Youth For Youth Staff**

Nathan Beck, City of Madison

Taylor Seale, UW-Madison Extension

Michelle Van Asten, United Way of Dane County

**By Youth For Youth 2025/2026 Recommended for Funding**

Proposal #	Project Name, Organization	Summary	Priorities Addressed	Youth Involvement	Location	BYFY Sole Funder?	Requested Amount	Recommended Amount
#5	"Nourish & Flourish Initiative" (Dairyland Dancing Diamonds)	Weekly dance/wellness sessions, nutrition education workshops, community food pantry, youth wellness/mentorship opportunities	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$3,000
#6	"Wisconsin Heights Closegap Initiative" (WI Heights School District)	Training and implementation of "Closegap", a daily digital check-in for students that enables early mental health intervention in school settings.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$3,000
#12	"Rooted in Community Gardens" (Rooted, Inc.)	Funding supports youth construction of new and damaged garden beds that are used for families to grow their own personal produce.	Food Security, Climate Change	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$3,000
#15	"Menstrual Equity Project" (East High School WAVE Club, MMSD)	Funding supports putting menstrual products in all of the bathrooms at East HS, including educational and promotional materials dissemination menstration equity and access.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$3,000
#16	"Run/Walk for Sexual Assault Awareness Month" (Imagine Club, Oregon High School)	Educational fundraiser supporting survivors of sexual violence, organizing a run/walk and proceeds are donated to local organizations in Dane County.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Sexual Assault Prevention	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$2,630
#19	"AHA & NAMI 5K Run" (Cardea)	Youth-led community fundraiser run supporting the American Heart Association and National Alliance on Mental Illness.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Immigration	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$2,500	\$2,500
#23	"Team Building Through Art Experiences" (Elver Park Neighborhood Center, Wisconsin Youth Company)	Youth-led and designed arts projects and field trips (creating a community mural, story telling, design techniques, 3D printing).	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$3,000
#29	"Plates With Purpose" (Meadowood Neighborhood Center, MSCR)	Student-led community initiative addressing food security and stigma, supporting consistence nutritional support to 35 families and 896 students.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$3,000
#38	"Planted with Purpose" (MTZ Charitable Organization)	Increases access to fresh, locally grown produce and engages youth in climate action practices. Youth are involved in the planning, planting, and maintenance of the site.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security, Climate Change	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$3,000
							<b>Grant total:</b>	<b>\$26,130</b>
							<b>Remaining:</b>	<b>\$0</b>
							<b># of funded proposals</b>	<b>9</b>

**By Youth For Youth 2025/2026 Not Recommended for Funding**

Proposal #	Project Name, Organization	Summary	Priorities Addressed	Youth Involvement	Location	BYFY Sole Funder?	Requested Amount	Recommended Amount
#1	"Carving Confidence" (Horizon High School)	Mental health project for youth recovering from substance misuse, youth use the arts to laser/carve affirming, supportive messages into cutting boards	Mental Health	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#2	"Brothers United" (Verona Area High School)	Funding for a young BIPOC mens club at Verona HS, focusing on self-esteem, healthy lifestyles, and community. Funding would support attending a conference or hiring a guest speaker.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#3	"Project P.E.A.C.E." (Mendota Elementary, MMSD)	Funding for "Breathe for Change" training program for a teacher at Mendota Elementary (SEL + Yoga certification), will select students to be leaders for weekly yoga clubs and whole group lessons.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	No	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#4	"Food Support" (West High School, MMSD)	Funds support grocery store gift cards to disperse to students in need (approximately 120 gift cards, \$25 each)	Food Security	No	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#7	"Souls in Bloom" (Latino Student Union, Middleton High School)	Monthly mental health support for latinx youth through storytelling, conversations, and activities (cooking, crafts).	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security, Immigration, Sexual Assault Prevention	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#8	"Project Food for All Mouths" (McFarland Youth Center)	Food security program where youth can cook larger meals to take home to family, will engage in kitchen utilization skills, and food preparation safety.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security, Immigration	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#9	"Riders 4 Race Amity" (R4RA)	Long distance cycling program that incorporates youth leadership, community service, active lifestyles, presentations, community events.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#10	"Building Bridges" (Catholic Charities of Madison)	School-based mental health program for families facing immediate mental health challenges.	Mental Health	No	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#11	"Powerful Teen Leaders" (Sustain Dane)	Summer youth employment program for teens in Madison, focusing on composting, recycling, food scraps, sustainability, and green careers.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Climate Change	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#13	"Young Samaritans Food Bowls" (Belleville High School)	Provides students with access to food before and after lunch hours (fruit, granola bars, etc)	Food Security	Yes	Dane County	No	\$2,892	\$0
#14	"GSA Field Trip" (Badger Rock Middle School, MMSD)	Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) field trip to a LGBTQ+ owned business, fostering local business support and community identity and belonging.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$1,160	\$0
#17	"Latinos Unidos Leadership Summit" (Verona High School)	Funding for a latinx youth summit, includes guest speakers, activities, and workshops that foster community, identity, and culture.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#18	"Music Makers Instrument Library" (Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra)	Funding keeps instruments high quality, which allows students access to them (who otherwise can't afford them)	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#20	"JUSTIFY Youth Summit" (Student Leadership Board, Cooperative Educational Service Agency)	Youth-led summit that promotes mental health, positive youth experiences, and leadership development. Session includes keynotes speakers and workshops.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0

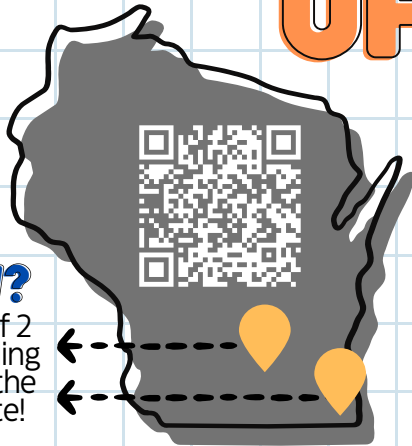
#21	<b>"Restorative Justice Mentors"</b> (East High School, MMSD)	Peer to peer mentorship program (East HS paired with students from O'Keefe MS and Emerson ES), to foster connection, belonging, and identity.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$3,000	\$0
#22	<b>"The Drum that Unites Us"</b> (Huegel Elementary, Kind Lesli Ann Ambassadors)	Cultural support club at Huegel ES, funding supports activities, materials, food, and guest speakers. Weekly club for Latinx students, activities include planning a community service project.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Immigration	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$3,000	\$0
#24	<b>"La Follette Angel Fund"</b> (La Follette High School, MMSD)	Yearbook purchasing and senior photos assistance program, yearbooks are created by students in the Writing for Media & Publications class.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$3,000	\$0
#25	<b>"Fostering Belonging, Equity, Inclusion and Learning Through Afterschool Clubs"</b> (Lake View Community School, MMSD)	Funds support after-school programs free-of-cost for students, also allows students a wide range of choices.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$3,000	\$0
#26	<b>"Madym Teen Senate"</b> (Madym)	Leadership program for Madym participants, including designing community outreach activities and providing feedback to Madym staff.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#27	<b>"STEMs Her Way Initiative"</b> (Memorial High School/MMSD, Courage to Dream Foundation)	Leadership program for BIPOC girls, supporting mental health, belonging, academic confidence, STEM exploration, and mentorship.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$3,000	\$0
#28	<b>"Youth Wellness Scholarship"</b> (Freedom, Inc.)	Scholarship for Black and Southeast Asian youth to support youth with transportation costs, copays and other medical feeds, food access, legal support, reproductive health needs, and more.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Food Security, Immigration, Sexual Assault Prevention	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#30	<b>"Pathways to Belonging"</b> (Union Latina Club, La Follette High School, MMSD)	Cultural student club focusing on field trips, community service, academic support, career/college readiness, and identity.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School, Immigration	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#31	<b>"The Catalyst"</b> (Verona High School)	Verona HS student-run newspaper, focuses on youth life skills, youth-driven topics, and peer communication.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#32	<b>"Mindful Moments"</b> (Meadowood Neighborhood Center, MSCR)	Six-week summer program focusing on teen mental and emotional wellness.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#33	<b>"The Birthright Experience"</b> (Memorial High School/MMSD, Courage to Dream Foundation)	Program for seniors at Memorial HS, who vocalized wanting student-led classroom discussions and deeper connections to literature and history studied in class. Curriculum focuses on identity, belonging, and emotional resilience.	Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	Outside Dane Co	No	\$3,000	\$0
#34	<b>"SPIRIT Day"</b> (Spartan Youth Service Club, Memorial High School/MMSD)	Student-led volunteer event, where HS students volunteer in classrooms at feeder elementary schools (assist teachers, engage with students, lead activities, etc).	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$2,500	\$0
#35	<b>"O'Keefe Compost System"</b> (O'Keefe Middle School, Marquette Elementary, MMSD)	Funds cover a partnership with Greenbox for an afterschool compost club. Program reduces waste in school environments and supports peer-to-peer education activities.	Climate Change	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#36	<b>"Mendota Community Opportunities/Field Trips"</b> (Mendota Elementary, MMSD)	Funds support attendance of Step Afrika! performance and workshop at the Overture Center, followed by a trip to the ice skating rink on UW campus. Program promotes socialization and experiencing new cultures and activities.	Positive Experiences Inside & Outside of School	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$2,453	\$0

#37	<b>"Mindful Matters at the ALC"</b> (MTZ Charitable Organization)	<i>Academic Learning Center provides free-after school academic support through social-emotional learning, mentorship, enrichment activities, and access to behavioral health services.</i>	<i>Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside &amp; Outside of School</i>	Yes	City of Madison	No	\$3,000	\$0
#39	<b>"STEM Sisters"</b> (Madym)	<i>Mentorship program at Madym, where youth work alongside college and high school alumni to design projects, give feedback, and support each other in STEM activities.</i>	<i>Positive Experiences Inside &amp; Outside of School</i>	Yes	Dane County	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#40	<b>"Madym Mapping"</b> (Madym)	<i>Geographic Information System program where high school youth engage in hands-on environmental data collection and analysis to investigate real-world climate and environmental issues affecting Dane County.</i>	<i>Positive Experiences Inside &amp; Outside of School, Climate Change</i>	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#41	<b>"Madym Mindful Moments"</b> (Madym)	<i>Summer internship program for high school students interested in STEM careers.</i>	<i>Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside &amp; Outside of School</i>	Yes	Dane County	No	\$3,000	\$0
#42	<b>"Hmong Club"</b> (Memorial High School, MMSD)	<i>Cultural immersion and connection club, funding supports engagement activities including guest speakers, field trips, and Hmong focused food.</i>	<i>Positive Experiences Inside &amp; Outside of School</i>	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$0
#43	<b>"Conditioning Your Mental Health"</b> (Black Student Union, La Follette High School/MMSD)	<i>Mental health awarness and advocacy group through the Black Student Union, where BSU students design and lead activities focused on mental health promotion.</i>	<i>Mental Health, Positive Experiences Inside &amp; Outside of School</i>	Yes	City of Madison	Yes	\$3,000	\$0

# CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF BYFY IMPACT!

## DID YOU KNOW?

BYFY is 1 of 2 youth funding models in the entire state!



**What is BYFY?** By Youth For Youth (BYFY) is an after-school program composed of high school students across Dane County that make investment decisions to support youth-led programming and initiatives. BYFY members analyze data to identify critical issues impacting youth, establish funding priorities, review grant proposals, and recommend funding from County and City grants to support \$3,000 projects developed and implemented by youth to serve youth.



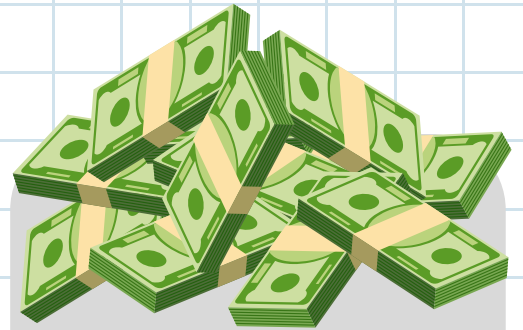
**In 1993**, United Way of Dane County, Dane County Youth Commission, and the Madison Community Foundation work together to establish By Youth For Youth (BYFY), a youth grant review committee that distributes funds based on priorities identified by youth.

**Oscar Mayer** agrees to be the main fiscal sponsor and provide snacks for BYFY meetings.

**In 1995**, the City of Madison creates a Youth Services Coordinator position. They provide administrative support to the BYFY program.

**In 2015**, Kraft closes the Oscar Mayer facility. United Way, the Youth Commission, and the City shift internal funds to fund BYFY. UW-Extension is brought on as the BYFY program leader.

**Today**, UW-Extension, the City of Madison, the Dane County Youth Commission, and United Way of Dane County collaborate together to provide administrative, fiscal, and programmatic support for the By Youth For Youth program.



**\$1,104,313**

**AWARDED IN GRANT FUNDING**

**542**

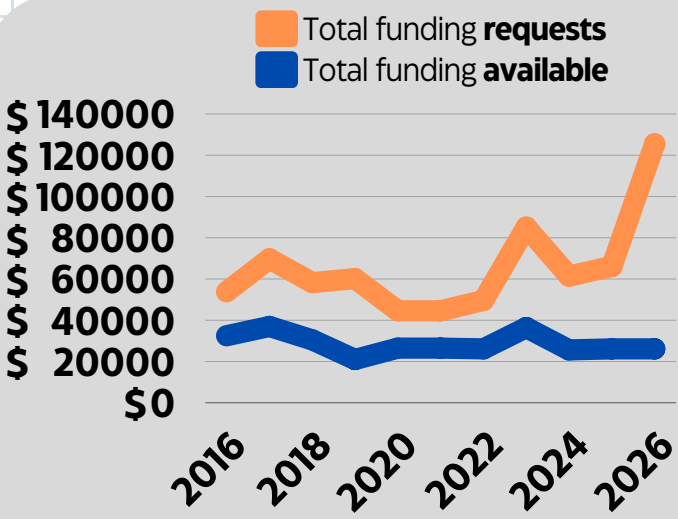
**FUNDED PROJECTS THAT BENEFIT K-12 YOUTH ACROSS MADISON & DANE COUNTY**

**750**

**TOTAL BYFY ALUMNI SINCE 1993**

**100%**

**YOUTH-DECIDED FUNDING MODEL**



Since 1993, an average of **\$30,000 is available** for BYFY youth members to award. But, an average of **\$71,000 in grant requests** come from across Madison & Dane County annually.

Funding priorities are chosen by each BYFY cohort, but over the years youth have consistently focused on:

- MENTAL HEALTH**
- RACIAL JUSTICE**
- CLIMATE CHANGE**
- LGBTQ+ SUPPORT**
- POVERTY & FOOD SECURITY**

**Project Highlight:**

**LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

*“Outdoor Education Kits for Kids” (2014)*

Elementary students lead initiatives and hands-on engagement in an outdoor learning laboratory through bird projects, fitness stations, wellness path, and an outdoor kitchen to make healthy recipes, as well as participate in a local volunteer project with seniors.

**Project Highlight:**

**GOODMAN COMMUNITY CENTER**

*“Summer Fun Backpacks” (2018)*

70 backpacks including bus passes, pool passes, movie passes, climbing gym passes, ice cream and food vouchers are distributed to homeless youth in Madison to give them an opportunity to engage in safe summer activities with free vouchers.

**Project Highlight:**

**AVICENNA SOCIETY OF MADISON**

*“Afghan Refugee Students” (2024)*

Supports English language tutoring and education costs for Afghan refugee students with specific needs: such as, flexible scheduling for students who have demanding work hours and are caregivers, have disabilities, and are women.

# WHY BYFY MATTERS

In program evaluations, BYFY youth consistently vocalize their personal improvements in **leadership** skills, **critical thinking** skills, **facilitation**, **ability to work in large groups**, as well as gaining a better understanding of youth issues in Dane County and how to address them.

When asked what skills they gained from participating in BYFY, youth said they gained **“teamwork, leadership, and confidence building skills”**, **“collaborative and communication skills in a professional setting and learning how local funding works”**, and **“being able to accept other people’s opinions and learn new perspectives.”**

When asked what they were most proud of from participating in BYFY, youth said they were proud **“to give funds to people in need and make an impact”**, **“to make new friends in different schools”**, and to **“be a part of the whole process and feel like we made tangible, positive change in our county.”**



# PBS Wisconsin Articles

EDUCATION | CLASSROOM MEDIA

## Empowering youth voices: Inside PBS Wisconsin Education's 'Field Notes'

In April, PBS Wisconsin Education will launch its new series, Field Notes on Climate, developed to connect learners in grades 6-12 to climate science and solutions.

Tawny Morrison

03/23/26



In April, PBS Wisconsin Education will launch its new series, [Field Notes on Climate](#), developed to connect learners in grades 6-12 to climate science and solutions.

In each episode, [host Ami Eckard-Lee](#) asks a question about climate change, leading her to meet experts and changemakers around the state. They explain the science around climate change impacts and share innovative solutions happening right here in Wisconsin.

A key element of the series is centering student voices. Youth perspectives are featured in every episode, not just as participants but as leaders and changemakers.



Khatri was a member of By Youth For Youth from 2023-2025 and a member of Youth Climate Action Fund from 2024-2025.

Reya Khatri is one of the young changemakers featured in an episode on youth action. She was member of By Youth For Youth (BYFY), a committee of Dane County high school students who identify needs around issues important to them and make investment decisions about youth-led projects developed to address those needs. She was also a member of Bloomberg Philanthropies' Youth Climate Action Fund (YCAF), which provides technical assistance and funding to help young people around the world design, produce and govern climate solutions in their communities.

PBS Wisconsin Education recently spoke with Khatri to learn more about her involvement and what others can learn from her experience.

**PBS Wisconsin Education: How did you become involved in BYFY and YCAF?**

**Khatri:** My involvement with BYFY first began during my junior year of high school. As a passionate and advocacy-focused individual, I was looking for initiatives to get involved in where I could apply these values and be a part of a program making tangible change. Through collective research efforts and communication from the BYFY team, I was able to apply and be selected as a member of this incredible organization. After my first year in BYFY, I was extended the offer to apply for the YCAF, which I found very interesting as I

enjoyed the more specific goal of the program in climate-focused initiatives.



Khatri (right) with fellow By Youth For Youth member Esther Ko during a filming for Field Notes on Climate.

**PBS Wisconsin Education: How has your work with BYFY and YCAF impacted your outlook or leadership style?**

**Khatri:** My work within BYFY and YCAF has given me the opportunity to engage in team deliberations and see firsthand the time and efforts that go into developing programs and evaluating initiatives.

Connecting back to my leadership style and outlook, I would say that these experiences allowed me to adopt a growth-heavy mindset where I learned to enjoy the process and seek ways to make deliberations more efficient. Throughout this process, I learned how to delegate tasks and find the most effective way to divide up tasks when it came to developing and presenting our final proposals to the City of Madison and United Way of Dane County.

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I would also reinforce the idea that change and being a part of change does not have to be a grand action. Simply spreading the word about a food drive or volunteering once a month at a local philanthropy still counts for getting involved and carries the same value as starting an initiative.

**PBS Wisconsin Education: What have you learned about youth climate action through these organizations?**

**Khatri:** Being a member of BYFY and YCAF allowed me to see the true impact that youth voices have in our community. Prior to this experience, I would have never imagined I would have the opportunity to be a part of an organization where youth get to evaluate and award grants to initiatives in their community. Yet, with the help of our incredible leadership team, we as students and youth in the community were able to help fund projects that will hopefully make a tangible difference and continue enriching our community. I see that as the real lesson and value gained.

**PBS Wisconsin Education: Is there anything people get wrong about youth voice and youth-led causes or projects?**

**Khatri:** I think the biggest stereotype or drawback people often think of when it comes to youth-led projects is that they are simply resume boosters or a short-term initiative.

My involvement in BYFY throughout the end of my high school career allowed me to see the consistency and passion many of these students had for their projects. The proposals I evaluated were more than words on paper; they all had a vision and youth-led passion to back it up.

I would also say that a lot of people might underestimate the time and effort youth put into actually implementing their projects. However, BYFY allowed students to develop budgets and a physical breakdown of implementation to aid with the real-world aspects of their projects.



Freedom, Inc.'s Roots of Resilience urban gardening project was one of the projects funded by Youth Climate Action Fund.

**PBS Wisconsin Education: There are many people, both youth and adults, who don't feel they have a way to contribute to the causes they care about in their communities. What do you want them to know?**

**Khatri:** To those who think they can't make a difference or contribute to youth projects as an individual, I would tell them that all it takes is one person to spark a movement. The most important factor to consider when getting involved in initiatives and causes in your community is to ensure it is something you are truly passionate about and want to help make a difference in. Passion alone is enough to drive creative ideas and spark methods of implementation.

I would also reinforce the idea that change and being a part of change does not have to be a grand action. Simply spreading the word about a food drive or volunteering once a month at a local philanthropy still counts for getting involved and carries the same value as starting an initiative.

*All episodes of Field Notes on Climate season 1 will be available April 22, 2026, on [PBS Wisconsin Education](#). Catch a special broadcast premiere at 8 p.m. Monday, April 13, 2026, on [PBS Wisconsin](#).*

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