ABOUT THE YOUTHSCAN PROJECT

Overview

The YouthScan Project is a new tool for youth in Colorado to share their ideas on the issues that impact their lives. Youth insight populates an interactive dashboard featuring verbatim input from young people and their ideas for solutions. This project simultaneously empowers youth to have real-world impact and youth-serving sectors to learn from youth they serve at scale. The YouthScan Project supports youth and adults to partner in order to direct resources to where they will have the greatest impact.

Where did The YouthScan Project come from?

YouthRoots launched The YouthScan Project in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth have experienced an unprecedented global event that disrupted development in critical arenas, including education, social skills and relationships, enrichment activities, and beyond. The context of the pandemic exacerbated existing concerns about youth well-being. Quantitative data sources about youth are critically important, and it can take 2 to 3 years for findings to be shared back with youth-serving organizations. In addition, these youth data sources often lack direct insight from youth about strategies and resources needed to address the issues they identify.

At YouthRoots, we know youth want to have an impact on the issues affecting their lives. And we know youth-serving sectors – from schools to nonprofits to state agencies – want to hear directly from youth that they serve. In this landscape, YouthRoots set out to create an innovative digital youth voice platform that could connect real-time insight from youth across Colorado with the organizations working on issues they care about.

Why Focus on Youth Voice?

The YouthScan Project is an innovation in the landscape of youth voice. It was designed to address the fact that the Journal of Community Psychology (2014) states: "Research suggests youth are aware of the issues in their community often 3 years ahead of adults, have important insights about how society should be different (Stoneman, 2010; London, Zimmerman, & Erbstein, 2003), and are often more creative and willing to take risks in tackling problems than adults (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005; Stoneman, 2010)".

The YouthScan Project empowers youth, centers their ideas for effective strategies and solutions, and provides organizations working on behalf of youth to access youth insight in real time.

At YouthRoots, we believe it is essential that we embrace innovation and commitment to listening to youth. So many young people are not able (or not asked) to participate in youth voice programs such as youth advisory councils and boards. The YouthScan Project empowers the thousands of youth whose voices are not being heard to share their point of view, deepen understanding, and help drive solutions.
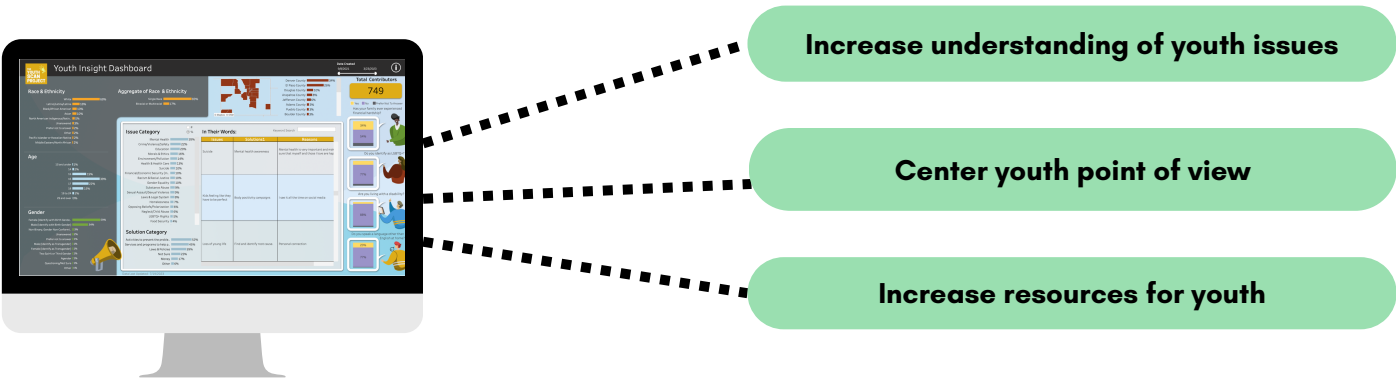
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How Does it Work?

Through an interactive and trauma-informed workshop, participants aged 14 - 24 identify current and emerging needs in their own words. At the end of the workshop, participants log on to the digital YouthScan Project portal and they receive an anonymous username. The portal walks them through a process of describing the issues they want to share and ideas about strategies and resources that would help. They are prompted to select which filter categories on the dashboard they would like their ideas to show up under. For each issue they wrote in, they can choose up to 2 issue filters from the list, and any number of solution filters.

Participants can submit up to three issues to be included in the dashboard. Youth share their ideas about strategies for prevention, ways to support impacted youth, policies to create change, and new innovative solutions to build a better future. Submissions can be filtered by county, demographics, timepoint, issue category, solution category, and keyword search. Verbatim ideas from youth populate The YouthScan Project Dashboard.

The YouthScan Project completed a pilot between July 2022 and June 2023, engaging over 700 youth across Colorado.

Increase understanding of youth issues

Center youth point of view

Increase resources for youth

What's the Impact?

This project simultaneously empowers youth to have real-world impact while allowing youth-serving sectors to learn from the youth they serve. The dashboard can be accessed by young people, youth-serving organizations, schools, advocacy groups, foundations, government, and policymakers to center youth voice in decision making and support youth-adult partnerships. Partners receive custom reports to inform resources and programs benefiting youth.

What are Youth Saying about The YouthScan Project?

"I loved the collaborative and youth-focused format of the workshop. The facilitators did an amazing job engaging the group and explaining the tasks at hand. I left the session feeling encouraged, motivated, and feeling like my voice is heard!"
–Youth Participant

"I loved the YouthScan Project I think it was a amazing way/idea to get involved as well as hear different perspectives and voices from others my age. It also helped me brainstorm ideas to improve our world in my future career."
–Youth Participant