

**Our Mission:**

To create healthy and resilient communities, Ironwood Tree Experience (ITE) makes it possible for young people to engage with the natural world and be stewards of the environment

## Youth for Blue Skies: 2023 Program Report



*Made possible with funding and support from Pima County Department of Environmental Quality and Citizens' Climate Lobby.*



Citizens' Climate Lobby

*We acknowledge that these programs were held on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Tohono O'odham Peoples. Ironwood Tree Experience honors their presence and stewardship of these lands since time immemorial through experiences that connect youth with their desert community.*

## Program Overview

Youth for Blue Skies (YBS) is an environment and community-based internship program in partnership with the Pima County Department of Environmental Quality (PDEQ). The internship program finished successfully with 8 youth interns from 5 different schools, ages 14-17, and 6 youth mentors from the YBS 2022 intern cohort.

Across 8 sessions, interns explored storytelling, air pollution, and environmental justice. By participating in workshops led by experts and YBS mentors, interns experienced the myriad ways that community members are building resilience in the face of climate change. By listening to nature's ever-abundant lessons, they developed a deep sense of connection with the human and more-than-human communities of the Sonoran Desert.

Throughout the program, interns distilled their vast experiences of interactions among humans and the natural world into oral and visual stories. Mentors carried out the Climate Action Projects that they proposed in 2022. At ITE's Season Finale on May 13, 2023, interns shared their stories and mentors reflected on their continued journey with YBS.

# YEAR IN REVIEW

**Interns** spent 110 hours in YBS programs between February and May. They participated in workshops, community events, and field experiences. Each intern received a \$350 stipend for their work in the program.

**Mentors** spent 32 hours in YBS programs between January and May. Thanks to funding from Citizens' Climate Lobby, they updated their Climate Action Projects then carried them out with interns and the community. Each mentor received a \$250 stipend for their work.

## YBS 2023 Calendar

### January 21

*Mentor Orientation at  
ITE Urban Field Station*

### March 4

*YBS Mentor Climate Action Project  
Workday: Teen Mental Health*

### February 1

*Intern & Family Orientation at ITE Urban  
Field Station*

### March 26

*Storytelling skills & exposition at the Fox  
Theatre*

### February 4

*Intern Orientation at  
Feliz Paseos Park*

### April 16

*YBS Mentor Climate Action Project  
Workday: Cyclovia*

### February 11

*YBS Mentor Climate Action Project  
Workday: Sustainable Landscaping*

### April 29

*Preparation for Storytelling Showcase at  
the Season Finale*

### February 23-25

*Campout at Gilbert Ray in Tucson  
Mountain Park*

### May 13

*Storytelling Showcase at the Season Finale*

## Community Partners & Workshop Leaders

Jordan Wiley-Hill & the Fox Theatre | Brad Lancaster & the Dunbar Neighborhood Foresters |  
Anne Rempe & Arizona State School for the Deaf and the Blind | Patricia Schwartz, Kate  
Saunders, Jessica Estrada, & the team at Living Streets Alliance

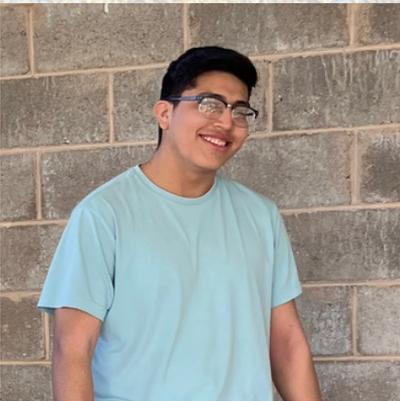
# YBS Interns



**Jatzyri Cruz**  
16 yrs.  
Desert Rose  
Academy



**Neydi Cruz**  
15 yrs.  
Desert Rose  
Academy



**Diego Dominguez**  
16 yrs.  
Pueblo High School



**Joe Dominguez**  
15 yrs.  
Pueblo High School



**Jaz Martinez-  
Guzman**  
17 yrs.  
Arizona School for  
the Deaf & the  
Blind



**Deija Moreno**  
17 yrs.  
Pueblo High School



**Mia Ramirez**  
17 yrs.  
Sahuarita High  
School



**Lauren Walker**  
16 yrs.  
Marana High  
School

# YBS Mentors



**From left to right, standing:**

**Kristen Sawyer (Youth Development Manager, ITE)**

**Jay Cruz (18 yrs. Desert Rose Academy)**

**Destiny Shosieduran (16 yrs. Pueblo High School)**

**Natalie Shepp (Senior Program Manager, PDEQ)**

**Ali Soland (18 yrs. City High School)**

**Bianca Carnazza (18 yrs. Rincon High School)**

**Sam Miranda (17 yrs. Sahuarita High School)**

**From left to right, front row:**

**Jesus Mendoza (16 yrs. University High School)**

**Paige Humphrey (Program Manager, ITE)**

# Program Highlights

## Sustainable Landscaping in Dunbar/Spring

**Community Connections:** *Brad Lancaster, Dunbar/Spring Neighborhood Foresters*

Following YBS Mentor Sam Miranda's Climate Action Project, interns & staff walked to the Dunbar/Spring neighborhood and learned about rainwater harvesting from Brad Lancaster. Interns experienced the joy of taking collective action, and in the process learned about the invaluable effort of "planting the rain" to sustain the lives of everyone in the Sonoran Desert.



## Campout: Connecting with Nature

**Community Connections:** *Saguaro National Park, Tucson Mountain Park*

Holding true to the heart of programs at Ironwood Tree Experience, interns & staff ventured to the Tucson Mountains for a 3-day campout. Interns spent much of this time connecting with the land and each other, in addition to learning & improving upon camping and outdoor skills such as tent set up, cooking outdoors, & culturally responsive Leave No Trace.



## Campout: The Storytelling Begins

**Community Connections:** *Jordan Wiley-Hill, Fox Theatre*

On the second day of the campout, Jordan Wiley-Hill from the Fox Theatre visited with interns to help start their journey with the art of storytelling. Jordan facilitated a mini-workshop that gave interns a chance to practice playing with elements that make a story compelling, such as story delivery and conveying emotion to the audience.



# Program Highlights

## Teen Mental Health Workshop

**Community Connections:** *Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, Coronado National Forest*

Following the leadership of YBS Mentors Ali Soland, Bianca Carnazza, and Jay Cruz, interns ventured to Sabino Canyon. With the sound of the creek rushing in the background, interns experienced & discussed the impact of spending time in nature on mental health, especially as a teenager. Interns decompressed from city life and enjoyed the magnificence of the Sonoran Desert!



## Storytelling Extravaganza at the Fox Theatre

**Community Connections:** *Jordan Wiley-Hill, Fox Theatre*

In continuing to create their stories for the final symposium, interns visited the Fox Theatre to meet with Jordan once again. Jordan led another mini-workshop, this time focused on crafting a story's beginning, middle, and end. Following this, interns attended "National Geographic Live: Adaptation with Alizé Carrère" at the Fox and were able to experience the power of climate-related storytelling on a global scale.



## Cyclovia

**Community Connections:** *Living Streets Alliance, PDEQ*

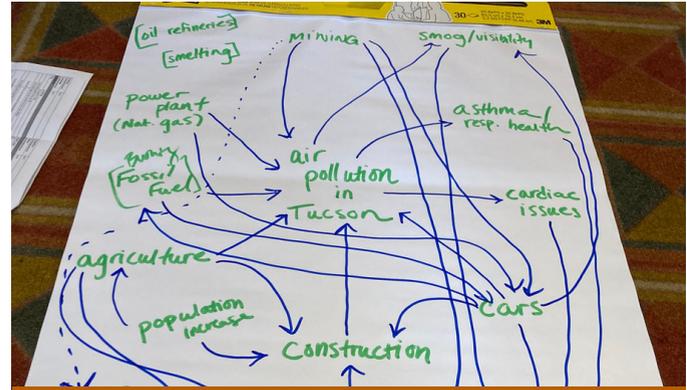
Last but not least for the YBS Mentors' projects, Jesus Mendoza and Destiny Shosieduran ran a storytelling booth at Cyclovia with the PDEQ staff. Meanwhile, interns participated in Cyclovia at large, experiencing the joy of car-free streets. Interns learned how reducing our dependency on cars is not only important for keeping our air clean, it's also a key pathway to making sure that people can live happier, healthier, and safer lives.



# YBS Storytelling Symposium



Storytelling practice at Sabino Canyon



Co-created mind map of environmental justice issues in Tucson

Throughout the internship, interns worked alongside Jordan Wiley-Hill from the Fox Theatre to craft a story that they felt confident sharing at the final symposium.

On May 13, 2023, interns moved audience members from ITE, PDEQ, and the community at large with their array of personal, creative, and highly diverse stories. All of the interns' stories showed a different perspective on what it means to be a person living during the time of a climate crisis, what it means to love one's community, and what it means to take action and be resilient.

At the symposium, mentors shared their reflections on how it felt to carry out their Climate Action Projects created in 2022. They shared the challenges that they faced, the successes that they experienced, and the skills that they were grateful to have learned throughout the process.



Final symposium group photo!

# Evaluation & Next Steps

Feedback from the group indicates that YBS continues to be a dynamic and influential program. However, interns found crafting their "climate story" broad and challenging, indicating that the program's focus still needs to become more specific in scope.

Finally, staff & interns both noted that they wished the youth had been able to spend more time meeting and engaging with community members & connecting with the natural world.



Interns hiking at King Canyon (Saguaro National Park West)

## Youth Recommendations

- Spend more time in green places
- Attend more events involving community
- Meet more often, if possible
- Plan for things to take longer than they should
- End by mid-April (testing) so that interns aren't overwhelmed
- Emphasize team building in the beginning with activities like camping

## Youth Reflections



**"I'm more sure of my future career. I want to become an environmental scientist or something to do with plants and nature."**

**"I'm more interested in working in a field related to both coding (my current planned occupation) and the environment."**

**"[I've learned] that young people care about what comes ahead."**