



UP for Change

Leadership Program

UP for Change Leaders 2024



Meet IYF's 2024 UP for Change Leaders

Young leaders driving more inclusive practices for youth with learning differences

About the UP for Change Leadership Program

Unique Perspectives (UP) for Change is a multi-year initiative implemented by the International Youth Foundation (IYF), with support from Oak Foundation, that seeks to expand funding to and awareness of best practices in programming for youth with learning differences through a youth-led participatory grantmaking process. To reach this goal, IYF created the UP for Change Leadership Program to partner with young people, to co-design, manage, and learn from the grant fund in support of Oak Foundation's learning differences strategy.

IYF is thrilled to introduce the first cohort of UP for Change leaders, a national group of 16 young people ages 14-23 who will hold significant power to decide what the grant portfolio's priority results are and which projects and organizations get funded. UP for Change Leaders will have the opportunity to build skills and community, gain valuable career exposure, and network in the education and disability justice spaces as they play important roles as advisors and advocates for improved policies and practices within the broader community.

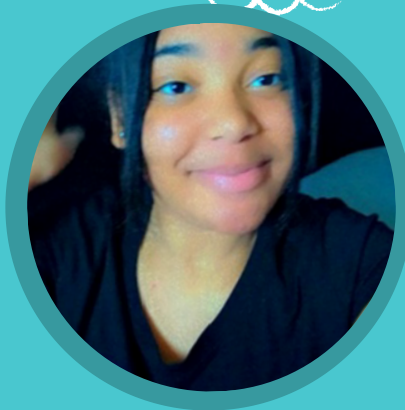
Let's get to know them!





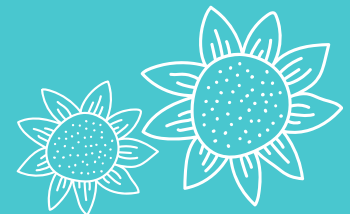
Averie Crane
(He/him)

Averie is in ninth grade and lives in South Hadley, Massachusetts. As a student with an IEP, he wants to make sure teachers have the proper training and credentials to teach special education students. He likes to draw and research topics to info dump to anyone who will listen. One of his favorite topics of research is fashion throughout the decades and has a special liking to the early 2000s fashion. Averie's passion for researching fashion comes from the opportunity that gives him to truly see a person by how they express themselves in their clothing. Additionally, he loves to research space and how the human brain and body work, which will eventually help him in his journey of becoming a mortician when he grows up. Averie also has a profound passion for visual art and the emotions and feelings of the artists that he can find in paintings and drawings. Whether it be poetry, painting, or drawings, Averie is convinced that we can feel the constraints of the human mind in ways that some wonderful people can put into art.



**Da'Kayla
McDowell** ☺
(She/her)

Da'Kayla is a Chicago resident studying in the 10th grade. She is an animal lover who, in 5 years, sees herself in college trying her hardest to become a Veterinarian. She loves nature and to be around water, and her favorite food is mozzarella sticks. Da'Kayla envisions a world in which young people with learning differences have many safe spaces to explore their thoughts and show us how to see things differently. As an UP for Change Leader, she hopes to further develop her leadership skills by learning to look at things from different perspectives.





Dakayla Mitchell

(She/her)

Dakayla is a 12th-grade student who lives in Sauk Village, Illinois. In her free time, she likes to do martial arts, record videos, write, draw, and paint. Something unique about her is that she is multi-talented, which is challenging because she wants to do many different things. If she could travel anywhere, she would go to Washington DC, as she has many ideas for the world. Dayakla envisions a future where young people with learning differences are respected and understood, and as an UP for Change Leader, she hopes to learn how to help people with learning differences, especially those like her with undiagnosed disabilities.



Daniel Dabney

(He/him)

Daniel graduated High School in 2022, and is currently on his third internship, working as a social media intern for a Mental Health Agency. He lives in Gary, Indiana, with his mom and younger brother, and likes to write stories, play games on a PC or mobile device, binge-watch shows, play ukelele, and practice content creation. In the future, he plans to pursue a trajectory in Communications with an emphasis on social media and minority advocacy, as understanding the struggles of minorities is very important to him. As an UP for Change Leader, Daniel hopes to learn how to further support people like his brother Kai, who has autism and ADHD. Though he has formerly done advocacy, he hopes to further develop his advocacy skills and be more aware of issues that deeply affect people in his community. Being deeply aware of how poverty heavily exacerbates the challenges people with learning differences face, he wishes for a future where people are more educated about neurodiversity and become more willing to create resources to support those with learning differences in their communities.

UP for Change Leaders 2024



**Emma
Van Winkle**
(She/her)

Emma is a sophomore at Kent State University, set to graduate in the spring of 2025. Some of her hobbies include photography, baking, and reading. She currently works as a photographer for the Kent Stater, an independent student-led newspaper on campus. She specializes in sports photography but also enjoys landscape photography. Emma loves to bake and spends a lot of her free time in the kitchen playing around with different recipes for her friends and family. In baking, she finds a good reminder of her great-grandmother and the time she spent with her, as she was the one who taught her how to bake. In the next five years, Emma sees herself working in a school as an intervention specialist or special education teacher, specifically working with elementary school kids with emotional behavioral disorders. She was first introduced to working with neurodivergent adolescents when she worked as a camp counselor in the summer of 2023, and through that experience, she found her passion for working with kids.



**Halla
Ismail**
(She/her)

Halla is a Junior at Towson University, Majoring in Healthcare Management. One of her greatest passions and hobbies is painting, and in her free time, she finds joy and inspiration in expressing creativity through art. If she could travel anywhere in the world, she would go to Florence, Italy, as immersing herself in its artistic atmosphere would be a dream come true. Through her school experience, Halla noticed a lack of understanding of learning differences, which inspired her desire to advocate for inclusive education. She envisions a future where teachers, employers, and individuals recognize that learning differences don't limit potential but that they offer diverse perspectives and talents.



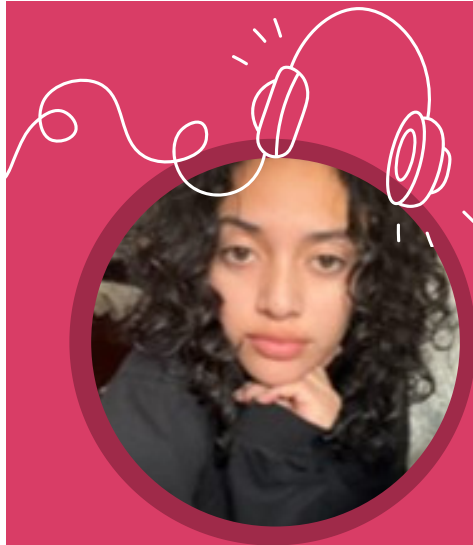


**Henry
Rudaitis**

(He/him)



Henry is a ninth-grade student in Greenlawn, New York, who believes that all of us should think of ourselves as Policy Advocates. He is a Boy Scout and a member of a bowling team, and in his spare time, he also enjoys singing and acting. Having been in all types of classrooms, Henry has a lot of ideas to help students like him succeed. He wishes for teachers and schools to see that we can all learn, we can all be included, and we all have potential.



**Jacqueline
Escobar**

(She/her)

Jacqueline is a Virginia native who was raised in Hyattsville, Maryland. She is a freshman at Prince George's Community College and plans on getting an associate degree in general studies, to later transfer to a university to major in Sports Management. She enjoys playing sports like lacrosse, soccer, and swimming, as well as listening to music, reading, exploring different places, and eating. If she could travel anywhere, she would love to visit all over Central America. She is Salvadorian and loves learning and talking about her culture, however, she also loves learning about other Hispanic cultures. Jacqueline's wish is for teachers, employers, and other individuals to understand the unique strengths, capabilities, and potential of young people with learning differences.

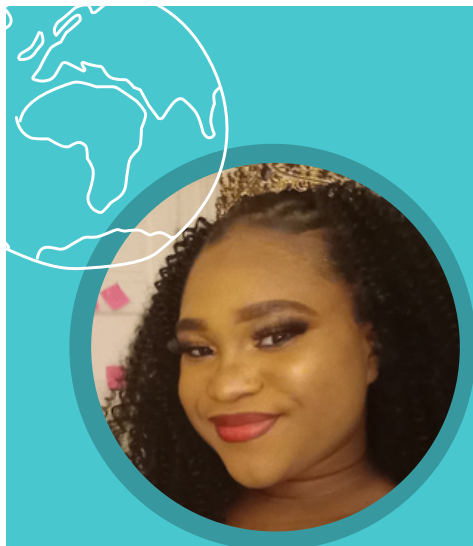




**Joseph
Fitzgerald**

(He/him)

Joseph is a High School Senior who lives in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. He enjoys calming activities like reading, writing, sketching, playing the cello, and listening to music to cancel out loud noises. In 5 years, he sees himself having graduated from college and working as a grant writer and writing novels on the side. His favorite food is fried chicken, and he likes watching international television shows. Joseph hopes that all educators know of all the work that was done so that IEPs could be recognized and 504s ratified. As an UP for Change Leader, he hopes to strengthen his leadership and advocacy skills.



**Kiarra
James**

(She/her)

Kiarra is a freshman at Kent State University in Ohio. She loves to watch TV shows and movies, as well as to write poetry. In five years, she hopes to have graduated college and have a job where she gets to do international travel, see the world, and learn new things. She was born and partially raised in Jamaica, and her favorite food is Jamaican-style liver. Kiarra envisions a future where everyone can learn comfortably and effectively because there are many ways to accommodate learning differences.

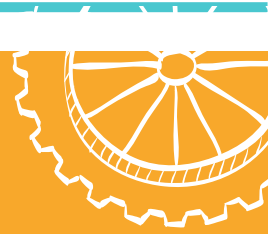




**Maurice
Thompson**

(He/him)

Maurice grew up in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, and is now a freshman at Prince Georges Community College in Largo, Maryland. He enjoys playing video games, riding dirt bikes and four-wheelers, playing basketball, and listening to music. Maurice wants to own a car detailing business one day and start trading, so he is currently learning about day trading and buying what he needs to start his business. As an UP for Change Leader, Maurice seeks to understand better what his mom does as a special education teacher in DC, and he wishes for more educators to adapt their classes to accommodate the different ways in which people acquire and process information.



**Shuri
Kyen Chungag**

(She/her)

Shuri lives in Detroit, Michigan, where she was born and raised. By the time she was 18, she had already lived in Colorado, Florida, Paris, and Texas. She has previously served as a youth peer support, giving mental health services to children affected by mental disorders, trauma, and major life changes. Now, she is in her third year of working at a K-8 school as a one-on-one aide and classroom support, a role that brings her a great deal of joy and that is broadening her worldview. After reworking her ideas about school and learning, based on her journey with undiagnosed ADHD, she now finds a lot of freedom and joy in the idea that her students' potential is not limited to their performance in conventional measures, and sees their potential in all the lessons they have yet to learn. When she is not at work or at the Zen Buddhist Temple she attends every Sunday, she likes to enjoy her home by the Detroit River, with her cat, Salvador. Shuri hopes to continuously become a better person, to be a college graduate, and to make it onto a 30 under 30 list. She also hopes to finish and publish some Children's books she has started. As an UP for Change Leader, she aspires to be the (young) adult she needed when she was younger and improve the lives of those with learning differences.



UP for Change Leaders 2024



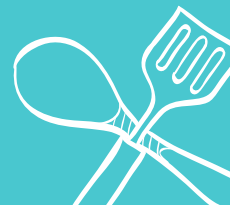
**Taylor
Thomas**
(She/her)

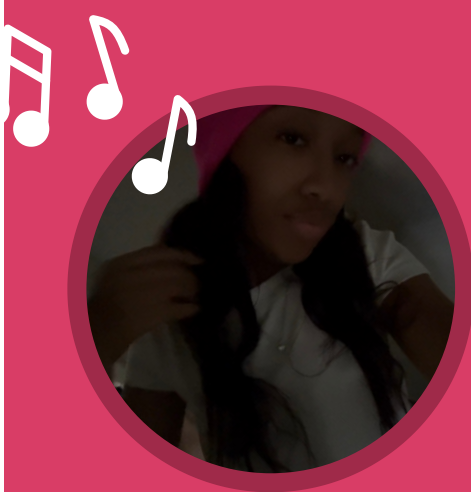
Taylor is a Chicago native who is currently studying Computer and IT applications at her local Community College. In her spare time, she enjoys photography and creative arts. If she could travel anywhere, we would go to Singapore, as she is in love with its architecture and government leadership. In five years, she hopes to have a job that supports her dream of pursuing a bachelor's degree in Data Analysis, while she starts to create her portfolio in film and graphics, something she really enjoys. Besides expanding her leadership skills as an UP for Change Leader, Taylor hopes to bring awareness and solutions to organizations and schools about the various ways to decrease gaps for youth with learning differences.



**Tempest
Allen**
(She/her)

Tempest lives in Chicago and studies in the 9th grade. She loves fashion, cooking with family, journaling, and reading. She considers that something that makes her unique is her mindset about life, and her favorite foods are boiled noodles, rice, and chicken. In 5 years, she sees herself graduating high school, getting ready for college, and owning a business. Tempest's wish is for adults to understand that, though young people with learning differences go through things that they might not understand, they have to help them and keep them in high spirits so they know that they have somebody to rely on, and are always assured they can do anything they put their minds to.





**Trinity
Allen**
(She/her)

Trinity is in the 11th grade and resides in Chicago. Her favorite hobbies are writing, drawing, and cooking. In her free time, she likes to rest, listen to music, and go out. If she could travel anywhere, she would go to Korea to try their amazing food and experience their lifestyle. Her favorite foods are tacos and Mexican rice. Something unique about Trinity is her dedication to her work and how involved she is. She envisions a future where young people come together to help those who need support.



**William
Elmore**
(He/him)

Will was born in Oak Park, Illinois, was raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and now resides in Chicago. He loves podcasts, as it interests him greatly to hear so many different perspectives and bounce off each other's thoughts. He sees himself as a mediator, as he seeks to bring open-mindedness and perspective to any situation or discussion. His favorite foods, without question, are Cheeseburgers, and something unique about him is that he is the only left-handed person in a very large family. Will wishes for teachers, employers, and the rest of society to understand the opportunities that lay in learning differences, as people with learning differences can see things in ways we never knew possible.

