



UP for Change

Leadership Program

UP for Change Leaders 2025



Meet IYF's 2025 UP for Change Leaders

A group of 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, which engages young people with learning differences, and those interested in or passionate about learning differences advocacy, in participatory grantmaking. Participatory grantmaking is an approach that shifts the power of funding decisions to the people most affected by issues or problems. It embodies the principle of “nothing about us without us” and empowers the communities who philanthropy is supposed to benefit to co-design, manage, and learn from philanthropic investments.

To carry out this initiative, IYF created the UP for Change Leadership Program. For the first cohort of this program, which ran from January - August 2024, IYF partnered with sixteen young leaders ages 14-24. This cohort established the funding priorities of the grant fund, reviewed applications, and selected seven organizations to be funded by this initiative.

For the second and final cohort, IYF is partnering with fifteen youth leaders, welcoming program alumni, and new members. As part of this cohort, UP for Change Leaders will learn about program evaluation and participate in grantee monitoring efforts. They will review reports from grantees, conduct evaluation efforts, and analyze and synthesize their findings to share them with the seven grantee organizations. Additionally, they will participate in a Partner Learning Event in October 2025, where they will convene with grantee partners to build knowledge and share learnings about what works best for diverse learners.

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. Additionally, they will play important roles as advisors and advocates, providing feedback to grantees on how they could expand access and inclusion for neurodivergent youth and advocating for improved policies and practices to the broader community.

Let's get to know them!

UP for Change Leaders 2025

Angelica Williams

(She/her)



📍 Michigan

💡 Creative | Ambitious | Kind

🌟 New Leader

About

My name is Angelica Williams, and I am a youth empowerment advocate based in Detroit, MI. Currently studying psychology and linguistics at Wayne State University, I plan on one day receiving my PhD in Community / Clinical Psychology from Georgia State University and continuing my work in community development, focusing on leveraging popular culture to advance research in Black mental health. This follows nearly ten years of activity in service learning, nonprofit, and community engagement work here in the city.

In my free time, I enjoy traveling, Japanese culture, reading, writing, video games, and horror movies. I enjoy pursuing interests that challenge me and see creative pursuits as conduits to translate unique, innovative, and complex ideas. While my focus remains on community development and psychology, I one day intend to publish a novel and become a New York Times Bestselling author.

Averie Crane

(He/him)



📍 Massachusetts

💡 Creative | Thoughtful | Funny

🌟 Senior Leader

About

A couple of things I'm passionate about are fashion and art! I like to draw and research topics that interest me so I can info dump to people who will listen. I also really want to be a mortician, so in five years, I see myself graduating college with an associate's degree and applying for a job in a funeral home.

Up for Change impacted my life by giving me a sense of pride and self-confidence. I felt like I became more aware of the accessibility of the world. I felt like my experience was going to help others like me.



🌟 The Senior Leader role is an advanced leadership opportunity designed for returning Leaders who wish to deepen their engagement in the program. This role allows participants to contribute in new and meaningful ways while further developing leadership, facilitation, and project coordination skills.

Clementina Jose

(She/her)



📍 New York

💡 Powerhouse | Trailblazer | Resilient

🌟 New Leader

About

My name is Clementina, a 23-year-old program manager overseeing a program supporting students with disabilities to graduate community college and secure employment. I earned a master's degree at 21, an unusual feat for my age. My academic journey was challenging; I faced significant educational obstacles and skepticism from my community. Despite being labeled as unlikely to succeed, I earned my bachelor's in two years, and my master's in another two. At 21, I became a licensed social worker, driven to support marginalized communities and offer them the same opportunities for success that I was fortunate enough to have. I am now pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership, focusing on helping underrepresented students excel.

Outside of work and academics, I enjoy creative activities like reading, painting, and coloring. I love exploring art and culture through pop-up museums and travel. This year, I visited two countries and plan another trip soon. Proud of my Nigerian heritage, I find joy in eating Jollof rice, my favorite food.

Emma Van Winkle

(She/her)



📍 Ohio

💡 Organized | Advocate | Joyful

🌟 Senior Leader

About

My name is Emma Van Winkle. I am 21 and a third-year student at Kent State University. My major is Special Education, and I have minors in Psychology and Autism Spectrum Disorders. I currently work at Solon Community Living, a community that serves adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. My plan for after graduation is to work in a classroom that helps kids with emotional and behavioral disorders. In 5 years, I see myself working in a self-contained classroom of young kids and helping them reach their academic and social goals. I also hope to see myself still working at Camp Nuhop; the camp was the place where I found my passion for working with neurodivergent youth.

Some of my hobbies include photography, baking, and reading. I love to bake and have found myself spending a lot of my free time in the kitchen playing around with different recipes for my friends and family. My favorite food is rolls. This may sound funny, but I've never had a bad roll from any place.

Fiza Sheikh

(They/them She/her)



📍 California

💡 Resilient | Empathetic | Visionary

☀️ New Leader

About

My name is Fiza Sheikh, and I am a 22-year-old student from Los Angeles, California. Currently, I am pursuing a degree in Economics with a minor in Accounting at UCLA, with plans to graduate in December 2025. In addition to my studies, I actively engage in projects and roles that allow me to advocate for equity, justice, and accessibility, particularly for marginalized communities. I also aspire to attend law school, with a focus on intellectual property and education policy, to further my mission of fostering inclusion and innovation.

In my free time, I enjoy weightlifting, hiking, writing, and cooking, which help me stay grounded and creative. One of my greatest dreams is to return to my homeland, Bangladesh, to immerse myself in the revolutionary changes being driven by its youth in areas such as the economy, education, and innovation. Participating in UP for Change aligns perfectly with my passion for educational justice and my commitment to amplifying diverse voices in decision-making processes.

Hamza Zia

(He/him)



📍 New York

💡 Innovator | Catalyst | Trailblazer

☀️ New Leader

About

Hamza Zia is a young transgender rights activist and social entrepreneur from Pakistan. As the co-founder of PINK Center, Pakistan's first-ever trans-led, trans-based social enterprise, he has dedicated the past four years to advancing economic empowerment and social equity for Pakistan's marginalized transgender community. Growing up in Pakistan's conservative society, Hamza experienced firsthand the systemic barriers and discrimination faced by transgender individuals. This personal understanding drives his mission to create sustainable economic opportunities through entrepreneurship and skills development, believing that financial independence is crucial for breaking cycles of marginalization.

Currently pursuing an Engineering degree at Washington and Lee University, Hamza brings an analytical mindset to social change. Through grassroots mobilization and community engagement, Hamza continues working toward his vision of a Pakistan where transgender individuals have equal opportunities to thrive and succeed.

Henry Rudaitis

(He/him)



📍 New York
💡 Positive | Kind | Funny
💪 Returning Leader

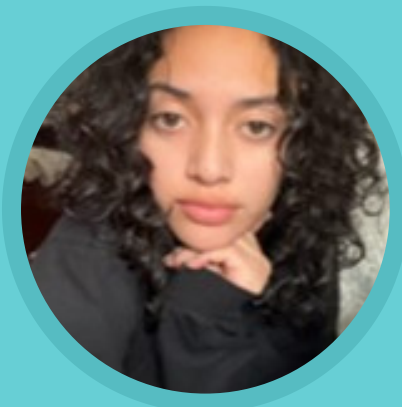
About

I'm Henry Rudaitis, and I live on Long Island, New York. I'm a 10th-grade student working on my Eagle Scout project, a Deacon at my church, on the Varsity Bowling team, and in the Theater Club at my school. In five years, I see myself in college studying communications or theater. If I could travel anywhere, I would go to London to visit Abby Road, because I'm a huge Beatles fan.

I recently saw the Disney movie, "Out of My Mind," which shows the bias of teachers toward special education students. I want to see more stories like this that show how all students benefit from inclusion. As Heather Simmons, a disability advocate, says, "Everyone is born in, everyone is ready, everyone needs support, and everyone can learn."

Jacqueline Escobar

(She/her)



📍 Maryland
💡 Patient | Attentive | Fair
💪 Returning Leader

About

I'm Jacqueline. I'm currently a student at Prince George's Community College. I'll graduate with an associate degree in general studies and transfer to the University of Maryland to receive my bachelor's and master's degrees in communication and a minor in marketing. I work as an intern for recruiting operations at the University of Maryland football team. I'm a lifeguard who also teaches swim lessons. I enjoy playing soccer and lacrosse with my friends during my free time, trying new food, and being with my dog, Oakley.

I'm passionate about working in the sports industry. With my internship and networking, I see myself working in the industry. I love eating pasta, wings, and sushi. My favorite thing about being a UP for Change Leader is socializing with new people, understanding, and deepening equitable learning opportunities for neurodiverse people. My UP for Change experience has made me embrace my role and educate others. It taught me to be open-minded and approach challenges with a solution-oriented mindset.

Laila Sabha

(She/her)



📍 Wisconsin

💡 Ambitious | Adventurous | Resilient

🌟 New Leader

About

Hi! My name is Laila, and I am a 24-year-old Palestinian-American graduate student born and raised in Wisconsin. I am someone who likes to stay busy through ways that lead to personal development. I triple-majored in neuroscience, biology, and psychology and attained a minor in chemistry. Currently, I am pursuing a master's in healthcare administration and teaching science and math at the high school level, accomplishing both at full-time statuses. I also work as a Neurodiagnostic technician at my state's largest hospital on an as-needed basis as a way for me to connect with patients and stay up-to-date on changes in medicine.

I am extremely passionate about travel and language learning. Both passions allow me to connect with people all over the world and increase my cultural awareness, which I find essential in not only being an empathetic teacher and healthcare provider but as a human being overall. I am fluent in English and Arabic and have learned German, Turkish, and Greek. In this past year, I have traveled to Budapest, Vienna, Istanbul, Colombia, and many other countries. I would love to travel to Spain and Argentina next.

Maya Razdan

(They/them She/her)



📍 Florida

💡 Analytical | Determined

Open-minded

🌟 New Leader

About

I am from Tampa, Florida. I graduated from the University of Florida and currently work as a grant writer with DC Peers. In my free time, I like reading, listening to music, and going on walks. My favorite food is fried plantains. Something unique about me is that I practiced naginata, a Japanese martial art, during college.

In 5 years, I see myself working in a technical writing or grant writing job where I can use my research and writing skills. However, I'm open to exploring new areas and seeing where my path takes me. I am interested in pursuing public service in the future, whether on or off the job.

Nicole San Lorenzo

(She/her)



📍 Washington DC

💡 Brave | People-person | Emphatetic

🌟 New Leader

About

My name is Nicole San Lorenzo and I am from El Salvador. I came to this country a year and a half ago to have better opportunities and be able to go to college, which is my greatest dream. I currently live with my older brother, who is my inspiration. I want to focus on getting my GED so I can apply for scholarships and go to UDC for college.

Samson Cournane

(He/him)



📍 Maine

💡 Patient | Empathetic | Loyal

🌟 New Leader

About

My name is Samson Cournane. I am studying a BS in Computer Science, I enjoy tennis and computer science. In 5 years I see myself working in management. If I could travel anywhere I would go to Spain because it seems like a country that has a lot to offer. My favorite food is sushi. I'm graduating this year and I'm 16 years old.

I envision a future where young people with learning differences are empowered through tailored educational systems that celebrate their diversity, fostering innovation and self-confidence. I wish that teachers, employers, and others understood the potential and resilience of diverse youth, recognizing their ability to thrive with the right support rather than viewing differences as deficits.

Sanjana Kavula

(She/her)



📍 Texas

💡 Driven | Compassionate | Innovative

🌟 New Leader

About

Hi, my name is Sanjana Kavula, and I'm originally from Dallas, Texas, but I'm currently a freshman Trustee scholar at Rice University located in Houston, Texas, where I'm double majoring in Neuroscience and Social policy. One of the things I'm really passionate about is making sure that students have a seat at the table. One of the projects that I've been leading is Project Pink Foundation, where I've had the opportunity to work on legislation and policies. We've been able to speak with the Texas Capital and Frisco School Boards, advocating for increased student representation on school advisory boards and Title IX legislation in these upcoming months.

I love being a photographer. It's something I picked up when I was around 6 with my aunt. And I really don't go anywhere without my Canon EOS M50, and I love it because it allows me to capture those small moments, as well as allows me to have a voice. I've been able to photograph many social justice movements, from the Free Palestine movement and the March for Our Lives to Roe Wade. I believe it's a way for me to combine my creativity with my desire for change and advocacy.

William Elmore

(He/him)



📍 Chicago, Illinois

💡 Observant | Stoic | Enthusiastic

🚀 Senior Leader

My name is William Elmore, and I am from Chicago, Illinois. I currently run a cake business called Mrs. P's Cakes. We serve, with love, the best old-fashioned pound cakes and bundt cakes that you could ask for! Baking has become a passion of mine. I love experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen. The ability to let your creativity run loose and have people enjoy the result is a beautiful process.

Being a part of UP for Change has been a beautiful process as well. Being a part of a group with like-minded, youthful leaders was an awesome experience! I loved being able to bounce ideas off of any of the other leaders, and it was met with positivity. My expectations for this upcoming cohort are to have even more of a blast than last time. UP for Change has redefined what it means to me to be a leader, and I aspire to be one every day now.

Shuri Kyen Chungag

(She/her)



📍 Michigan

💡 Compassionate | Thoughtful
Creative

👤 Senior Leader

About

Shuri Kyen Chungag is a student, educator, and community member who lives and works in her hometown of Detroit, Michigan. Being passionate about education and children's well-being, Shuri works to support the kindergarten classroom at The James & Grace Lee Boggs School. She fulfills this role while finishing her degree in Special Education. When she's not in the classroom or working toward her degree, Shuri often finds herself tending to her creative pursuits. This work includes children's book authorship and documentary filmmaking, with projects she hopes to share widely in the coming years. Shuri also gravitates towards dance as a means of expression, using music to connect her to her ancestry from Cameroon, West Africa (somewhere Shuri goes as often as possible for the opportunity to be with her family).

Shuri envisions and works toward more equitable learning opportunities for neurodiverse youth by showing up every day in her role as educational support. She also has a history of working with organizations and programs that support neurodiverse communities, such as CAST and Wayne RESA. Shuri expects that her return to UP for Change will be an opportunity to increase her passion and capacity for justice work in education, as the last cohort was. Shuri hopes to use her return as a Senior Leader to deepen her facilitation skills and team-building as she grows and learns alongside her peers.