



## Youth UpRising: A Center for Youth Leadership and Community Transformation

*Factors: Social, service*

Youth UpRising (YU) grew out of the needs articulated by East Oakland youth after racial tension at Castlemont High School escalated into violence in 1997. Young people pointed to inadequate educational resources, insufficient employment opportunities, limited health resources, and a lack of “things to do” as root causes of the problems facing youth. The Alameda County Health Services Agency and City of Oakland officials responded by authorizing the conversion of a vacant facility adjacent to Castlemont High into a youth-leadership development center. Early research and development saw YU founders scanning local and national youth organizations for best practices and models, including Harlem Children’s Zone. They also convened a diverse group of stakeholders—youth representatives, community leaders, clergy members, service providers, and public officials—to envision and draw up plans for what would eventually become Youth UpRising.

Youth UpRising’s vision is to build healthy and economically robust communities by harnessing the leadership of young people to become agents of positive change. Its mission is to support young people in actualizing their potential through:

1. Consciousness Raising
2. Personal Transformation; and
3. Hard Skills/Leadership.

Youth UpRising provides comprehensive, fully integrated health and wellness, career and education, and arts and culture programming to Alameda County youth ages 13 to 24, with an emphasis on those living in East Oakland. YU’s primary population lives in neighborhoods with pervasive poverty, high dropout and unemployment rates, child abuse and hospitalization due to assaults, and endemic substance misuse. As a result, these young people face tremendous barriers in navigating adolescence successfully into adulthood, barriers that are both external and internal. To combat these barriers and expand life opportunities for young people, Youth UpRising provides comprehensive programming in a 25,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility and brings a wide array of free services under one roof—conveniently accessible to YU members—by partnering with a variety of “anchor” organizations. Programming and activities operate as follows:

- Health and wellness activities comprise 52 percent of YU’s overall programming. These activities are anchored by Children’s Hospital and Research Center in Oakland, with support from the Upaya Center for Well-being, and in partnership with Youth UpRising’s Sports and Recreation Department and the PeaceMaking Team. This is the central framework for YU’s approach to holistic, comprehensive, youth leadership development. Primary healthcare and mental wellness services are provided in a 3,600-square-foot clinic.
- Career and education comprises 41 percent of programming and is anchored by Youth Employment Partnership, along with the Alameda County Office of Education. This programming provides ample opportunities for youth to gain leadership skills and meaningful work experiences while exposing them to a variety of career options and ensuring that they utilize education as a means to increase their competitiveness in the job market. This area also encompasses the Social Enterprise department, featuring Youth UpRising’s onsite Internet restaurant, Corner’s Café, which creates jobs and offers career promotion, entrepreneurship support, and income generation.

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- Arts and cultural activities are anchored by Youth UpRising and the Destiny Arts Center, comprising 7 percent of YU's overall programming. Destiny Arts Center anchors physical, performance arts that provide youth with alternative, safe channels to develop self-esteem, discipline, cultural and artistic pride, as well as physical fitness. Media Arts, anchored by YU, includes music and film production as well as web-radio.

Youth UpRising's accomplishments have been consistently impressive and reflect continual growth in all aspects of the organization. The 2,200 enrolled members respond to YU's approach of coaching transformative activities in a culturally relevant package that gets young people into the building and then offers multiple vehicles to access comprehensive services. YU is also a safe environment and has become a regular meeting place for community groups throughout the Bay Area. It has also successfully established the infrastructure required to manage the 25,000-square feet of space, including staffing, operational procedures, and a mixed base of funding from the public sector, foundations, and individual supporters. The achievements so far have been widely recognized by every major (and community) media outlet, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*.