



Y-PLAN program pushes students to change local policy

BY NATASHA VONKAENEL

When Anastasia Thanpaeng's classmates in the Health and Medical Sciences track at Hiram W. Johnson High School first heard about Y-PLAN, the junior says there was a chorus of grumbling. Students were initially skeptical because, "Nobody really listened to students or our voices. They just wanted to hear what adults said," Thanpaeng says.

In Y-PLAN, or Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now, students choose a problem, are matched up with a civic organization, then conduct research and surveys that are presented to local leaders and policy makers.

With the help of local nonprofit WALKSacramento, students divided into groups and explored the urban environment around their school, documenting areas needing improvement or attention. The Health and Medical Sciences track, Y-PLAN and WALKSacramento are all supported by funding from The California Endowment, which supports community health programs in South Sacramento.

Thanpaeng's group honed in on a regularly used bus stop on 65th Expressway and Lemon Hill Avenue. The sign was hidden behind overgrown bushes and there was no place for students to sit while waiting for the bus to arrive.

"They are all scattered and they aren't talking to each other," Thanpaeng explains, emphasizing how a bench would encourage the students to congregate.

Her group conducted surveys of students, administrators and community members and

found that an overwhelming majority would be more likely to use the bus if they felt safer at bus stops and if the stops were more aesthetically pleasing.

"OUR VOICE, US STUDENTS, WE CAN BE HEARD. WE CAN MAKE WHAT WE WANT TO HAPPEN, HAPPEN."

Anastasia Thanpaeng
11th grade student at Hiram W. Johnson High School

They presented this data and other research to district staff, community members, fellow students and teachers, recommending that two benches be installed, one on each side of the street.

Then summer hit and Y-PLAN was put on pause until school started again in September. But not for Thanpaeng. She forged on, continuing to work with WALKSacramento and reaching out directly to Regional Transit.

By September, the two benches were finally installed and the overgrown shrubbery cut back, revealing the bus stop sign. The success of Thanpaeng's group has made it clear to her



Anastasia Thanpaeng sits on the bench her Y-PLAN group helped get installed at the bus stop on 65th Expressway and Lemon Hill Avenue. Seeing the bench for the first time makes Thanpaeng feel "proud and excited" about her work with the program. Photo by Natasha vonKaenel

peers how much adults value the opinions and concerns of youth.

"Our voice, us students, we can be heard. We can make what we want to happen, happen," she says, adding that Y-PLAN also helped elevate student conversations around health.

"Ever since we started Y-PLAN, I feel like my peers are more educated about health in the community. We actually talk about health in our community and educate others."

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Learn more about starting Y-PLAN at your school by visiting y-plan.berkeley.edu.



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