

# These Lansing-area teens have thousands of dollars at their disposal to help you

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When you picture a person involved in philanthropy, what do they look like?

A millionaire.

A celebrity.

A politician.

How about a 17-year-old high school kid from Lansing?

Carlos-Aldo Lopez-Resendiz and several other teenagers in Greater Lansing parceled out more than \$50,000 to 12 organizations in 2019. That includes St. Vincent Catholic Charities, Shared Pregnancy Women's Center and Capital Area United Way College Access Network.

As members of the Community Foundation's Youth Action Committee, the teens review and score grant applications or research and invite non-profits to apply for grants. The Community Foundation supports hundreds of causes and charities throughout mid-Michigan.

"Grantmaking is pretty cool. It's not every day someone hands you \$30,000 and asks, 'What will you do with it?'" said Lopez-Resendiz, a senior at Everett High School who has been a member of the Youth Action Committee since he was a freshman. "You can make a difference."



Community Foundation's Youth Action Committee member Carlos-Aldo Lopez-Resendiz, a senior from Everett High School, speaks during a meeting on Monday, Jan. 13, 2020. The teen review and score grant applications or research and invite non-profits to apply for grants.

The teenagers operate in three branches representing Lansing, St. John's and Charlotte but often work together during their monthly meetings.

"The Committee gives them a voice and power in the community to make changes," said Tracy Russman, community investment associate at the Community Foundation. "Some see drug issues at home and want to fix it. They have friends or family affected, or they hear about it."

A youth-run endowment fund was something the W.K. Kellogg Foundation required when it challenged the 80 community foundations in Michigan to create local youth action committees in 1991.

Because of the Youth Endowment Fund, these teenagers can bring their concerns to the forefront and work out solutions that benefit real people financially.

"It's so much more than giving money," said Divya Reddy, a 16-year-old from Williamston who helps run the Youth Action Committee's Lansing branch.

## Empowering the next generation

Since its inception, the Youth Action Committee has brought together teenagers from different high schools, backgrounds, ethnicities and ages and tasked them with determining which organizations should receive money and even actively going out into the community and helping those in need.

In recent years, the Youth Action Committee has often voted to fund organizations centered on physical abuse, pregnancy, college-readiness and more. They've also helped less fortunate families at the Salvation Army and sung Christmas carols to the public.

Reddy advocated among her peers to donate money to organizations supporting mental health and LGBTQ people, causes she said are close to her heart. She is involved in the Gay-Straight Alliance at school and has personally struggled with mental health.

"It can feel isolating, like you're the only one, and there is no one to help. Going out and helping those who feel isolated like I did — it's empowering," Reddy said. "If there are students that feel hopeless, YAC is a way to get that hope back."

Reddy is the the chair of the Lansing branch of the Youth Action Committee and the 2019-2020 student trustee on the Community Foundation's Board of Trustees. She reports to the board about the Committee's fundraising and grantmaking activities and runs the group's monthly meetings at the Marshall Street Armory.



Williamston High School student Divya Reddy, center, helps run a Community Foundation's Youth Action Committee meeting on as fellow member Zoe Smith, left, and Ava Harvey, right, listen on Monday, Jan. 13, 2020, at the Marshall Street Armory in Lansing. The teens review and score grant applications or research and invite non-profits to apply for grants. (Photo: Nick King/Lansing State Journal)

## The next round of youth funding

This year, the Youth Action Committee plans to tackle substance abuse, including vaping and performance drugs; bullying and cyberbullying; self-harm, stress and other issues that came out of an assessment survey given to youth in Greater Lansing.

The 300 responses the Committee received will help them determine what organizations to fund.

But one thing is for sure: Programs addressing drug use will definitely be getting their money.

Lopez-Resendiz often hears statistics about vaping or other drugs. But these numbers never felt real until he heard about the challenges his peers face.

"We talked about pills going around school. I don't think it's a big deal at Everett, but it gives you insight into what's going on," he explained.

His Everett classmate and friend, Madison Odenwald, agreed, saying she'll never forget the day one member described the coordinated drug use and smuggling of drugs at a local high school.

The Committee will also continue to fund college-readiness programs, something Lopez-Resendiz can relate to. He's in his final year of high school.

He already has a college in mind — in addition to a potential career.

Lopez-Resendiz unzipped his winter jacket to show off his green and white Michigan State University T-shirt.

"I can see myself doing philanthropy after high school," Lopez-Resendiz said. "It's a gateway to doing more impactful things."



Community Foundation's Youth Action Committee coordinator Jennifer Ashton, center, talks with student members during a meeting on Monday, Jan. 13, 2020, at the Marshall Street Armory in Lansing. The teens review and score grant applications or research and invite non-profits to apply for grants. (Photo: Nick King/Lansing State Journal)



Community Foundation's community investment associate Tracy Russman talks with teen members during a Youth Action Committee meeting on Monday, Jan. 13, 2020, at the Marshall Street Armory in Lansing. The teens review and score grant applications or research and invite non-profits to apply for grants. (Photo: Nick King/Lansing State Journal)