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YAC's Photovoice Project Earns Award

Teenagers from the City of Perris Youth Advisory Committee fanned out on a mission to capture, through photography, images that raised concerns and posed challenges for their community.

Over the course of a Saturday morning in 2015, they photographed crosswalks in need of restriping, sidewalks with broken concrete, fast-food restaurants dominating prime locations on major streets and parks with inadequate trashcans, which left them looking neglected and dirty.

After weeks of culling their images, the "Photovoice" project was submitted to the Inland Empire Section of the American Planning Association for possible recognition. Five members of the Photovoice experiment were on hand recently when their project took home the association's "Public Outreach Award" in a ceremony in Riverside.

Youth Advisory Committee members Gabby Bulacan, Brittany Burch, Alexa Olivas, Viviana Pavon-Cortés and India Rockett accepted the award in front of dozens of professional planners, municipal administrators and elected officials in a May 19 ceremony at the Riverside Convention Center.

The City of Perris was represented by Clara Miramontes, director of development services; Isabel Carlos, assistant director of administrative services; Sabrina Chavez Assistant Director of Perris Community Services and Housing Authority; Sara Cortés de-Pavon, Perris housing authority grants manager and Ilene Lundfelt, associate planner.

Miramontes praised the effort and commitment of the YAC members, who spent hours in workshops with planning pros discussing which photos—which were captured on cellphone and digital cameras—to submit for the award.

"I am very impressed how the committee members embrace this project," Miramontes said. "They rolled up their sleeves and really dove into it. Their photos were meaningful and the students took them because they wanted to improve their City."



Members of the City of Perris Youth Advisory Committee were honored for their Photovoice project at a ceremony May 19 in Riverside. Appearing at the ceremony to accept the award were Gabby Bulacan, Alexa Olivas, Viviana Pavon-Cortés, Brittany Burch and India Rockett.

Photovoice explained

Photovoice is a community-engagement tool that uses photography as a creative approach to explore different human experiences and to work for social change.

The photographs become the basis for group discussion of community issues and concerns, such as a lack of healthy food markets and parks that need sprucing up, as the Perris YAC illustrated. Photovoice can be used to highlight concerns of young people and spur them to make changes in their communities.

The Perris Youth Advisory Committee used its Photovoice experience and made presentations and recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council.

Those included calling for a Farmer's Market to provide healthier food options, greater numbers of trash cans in community parks, a community clean-up day to spruce up parks and recreation sites, adding new walking and bicycle trails and promote events that included exercise to improve the quality-of-health for Perris residents.

The City acted on several recommendations.

Perris has started its Green City Farm Program, a community garden that eventually will allow residents to grow and harvest a wide variety of vegetables, including lettuce, kale, tomatoes, peppers and herbs. A new 10-mile hike and bike trail is in the development stage. A walking trail and fitness stations have been installed at Linear Park.

In addition, the City continues sponsoring weekly workouts in Perris parks and instituted a series of hikes and bicycle rides to get families up and moving.



Youth Advisory Committee member Gabby Bulacan addressed the crowd at the American Planning Association Awards ceremony. With her on stage are members of the YAC and Perris City staff members.

Community pride

The YAC members say they are motivated by a sense of community spirit and Perris pride. Many committee members have volunteered for hundreds of hours over the last two years, working on parades, community clean-ups, organizing open mic nights, creating public-service announcements on issues pertinent to teenagers and other projects. Making presentations to elected representatives has also improved their public-speaking skills and makes them feel comfortable when they talk to the City Council and administrators.

"Working with the Youth Advisory Committee has given me great pride to be part of the City," said Bulacan, 16, who attends Rancho Verde High School. "It makes me proud to be from Perris."

Burch, 16, who attends the California Military Institute, said she is pleased the City created to youth commission.

"They wanted to reach out and hear our views, which I'm sure most of us really appreciate," Burch said.

Pavon-Cortés, 17, who attend Temescal Canyon High School, called receiving the APA award "a great honor" and praised the City for respecting the perspectives of its teenagers.

"The City wants our voices as teenagers to be heard," she said. "It's great that we are being listened to by the people who run the City."

Olivas, 16 a student at Rancho Verde High School, said working with the youth committee allows her to shape programs and events in her hometown.

"You really can make a difference in your community," she said.

Rockett, 16, who attends Rancho Verde High School, said she appreciates the opportunity to inform Perris decision-makers about issues important to young adults. Like her peers on the youth committee, Rockett said she was shocked to learn their Photovoice project proved a prize winner.

"I appreciate the City of Perris giving us the opportunity to do something good and care a positive change in 2016," she said.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch called the efforts of the Youth Advisory Committee members "just outstanding" and said they have made the City proud.

"They have taken on many major projects and have seen them through from start to finish," Busch said. "They are a fine example of the kind of young people we have in the City of Perris. They have set the standard for the Youth Advisory Committee."



Perris staff members, supporters of the Photovoice project and teenagers from the City's Youth Advisory Committee pose with the award received from the American Planning Association May 19 in Riverside.

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