



Seth Wittman, YouthBridge-NY '05, University of Michigan '09

I was fortunate enough to participate in YouthBridge-NY's inaugural year of 2003-2004, as well as in 2004-2005. Nearly a decade later, it still plays a prominent role in my life; the connections I made, the internships it afforded me, the lessons I learned and the people I met continue to influence me today. YouthBridge-NY made me appreciate the melting pot that is NYC even more, as well as the importance and value of diversity—something I took with me to the University of Michigan and something that is still a strong part of my identity. YouthBridge-NY helped shaped me into the young professional I am today and provided me with amazing experiences beyond the required meetings we had. For that, I am forever thankful, and am proud to have participated in and remain a part of this leading organization.

Victor Wong, YouthBridge-NY '07, Harvard University '11

I applied to YouthBridge-NY in the summer of 2005 prior to my junior year at Stuyvesant High School. My mother had come across a short newspaper article featuring the participation and involvement of a few Asian-American students at that year's Youth Summit. Thinking it was an interesting program, she encouraged me to apply to be a Fellow. I was hesitant at first, skeptical of any program that purported to train the next generation of young leaders. All my life, I believed that leadership was an innate quality, a natural gift bestowed on the charismatic, the articulate, the eloquent, and the cultured. As a stereotypically bookish, introverted, awkward, and tongue-twisted Asian-American boy, I'd long since consigned myself to being a follower. In spite of this skepticism, I applied and was accepted to the program. And fortunately, my beliefs about leadership were proven very, very wrong.

It wasn't long before I understood that leadership is earned and cultivated. It doesn't necessarily belong to the individual who talks the prettiest or the loudest. It belongs to the individual who is motivated to do what others are unwilling or unable to do. To the individual who is willing to take the initiative to do what needs to get done. It is a skill. And YouthBridge-NY provided me so many opportunities to cultivate this skill, whether it was asking me to make a public statement at Borough Hall on behalf of youth against an awful hate crime, allowing me to grow my network through meetings with community leaders and elected officials, or giving my input real weight in a grantmaking process.

Additionally, I grew in so many other ways because of the program. I became more aware and interested in current events and political happenings after meeting with Speaker Christine Quinn and CBS Anchor Roz Abrams. I confronted my fears of public speaking time and time again. I was able to give back to the community through various volunteer events, such as Teensgiving and Habitat for Humanity. I developed an appreciation for diversity after conversations at the Museum of Tolerance and with COPO's Moe Razvi. I learned how to manage conflict through workshop trainings emphasizing empathy and consensus-building. Time and time again I was asked to step out of my comfort zone and to engage with the unfamiliar. And time and time again, I grew from the experience and became increasingly confident in my capacity to make change.

I'd spent the first two years of high school focused on getting good grades and was hardly involved in any extracurricular activities. However, after joining YouthBridge-NY, I put my newfound leadership skills and beliefs to the test. I campaigned to join the National Honor Society's Executive Council and was elected Vice President of Tutoring, a role I used to completely transform the way peer tutoring services were provided. I co-founded and organized my high school's Quiz Bowl team, which rose to become a regional champion and a contender for the national championship. I wrangled my way into a lab assistant position at an NYU physics lab, where I conducted research that earned me a place in the Semi-Finalist stage of the Intel Science Talent Search. Had YouthBridge-NY not encouraged me to always step up and take

charge, I likely would have been content going through high school in relative anonymity. Instead, I was inspired to dream big and become more, and that made all the difference.

In my senior year, I was accepted early to Harvard. I attributed this entirely to luck, until less than a month later, just a few weeks after the regular submission deadline and months in advance of the official notification date, I received "likely" admission letter from Yale. I couldn't pinpoint a particular reason for this, until I received an e-mail from the Yale admissions officer who read my application: "I was so impressed with your accomplishments that I nominated you to receive the likely letter. I think it was wonderful that you donated your Bridge Fellowship stipend to a non-profit organization!" My college acceptances weren't the result of luck. They were directly attributable to my participation in YouthBridgeNY as well as to the wonderful organizers and mentors who guided my development and supported me in my endeavors.

I graduated from YouthBridge-NY in June 2007. Fortunately, that wasn't the end of my connection to the community. I remained involved as much as possible, participating in several orientation retreats as a chaperone and staffer and helping to organize the occasional alumni outing. I also got to know later cohorts of Fellows and have remained connected to many of the alumni.

During college, YouthBridge continued to influence my life. After spending two years immersed in my studies and focused on training for ballroom dancing competitions, I realized I was out of touch with the world around me. So, the summer before my junior year, I volunteered for my first political campaign and ended up taking a semester off to work full-time for the campaign. This experience inspired me to devote my life to public service. When I returned to school, I became a core member of the campus's Dream Act advocacy organization, charged with engaging the Harvard community to support legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth. In my senior year, I co-organized a team of undergraduates that ran the Boston Marathon in burger and fry costumes to raise over \$15,000 for Back on My Feet, a national non-profit organization that promotes the self-sufficiency of the homeless. Before I graduated, I accepted a job at the New York City Economic Development Corporation, where I now work on initiatives to bolster and diversify the City's economy on behalf of City Hall.

Thanks to YouthBridge-NY, I was quite the youth leader. And now that I am older, I aim to extrapolate the lessons I learned from program to become a full-fledged leader. This, coupled with my passion for public service, is why I plan on someday running for elected office. I still have a long way to go, but if YouthBridge-NY taught me nothing else, it's that I can make a difference and that I am capable of anything. And that's why I know I will achieve my goal.

Lyubov Zeylikman, YouthBridge-NY '08, Carnegie Mellon University '12

YouthBridge was an exciting time during my Senior year, that I still think about today. Not only did I get a chance to meet some of the bright emerging leaders from across NYC but we were able to visit and explore some amazing spots all around the city. For example, one of the personal highlights for me was getting the chance to visit Gracie Mansion for an event where Michael Bloomberg was honoring Israel's Independence Day. It was such a unique opportunity that I do not believe will come again soon (if ever). It is awesome that years down the road I can still say I got the chance to meet some great people, and be invited to events that most high-schoolers (let alone adults) rarely get the chance to participate.

Santiago Mueckay, YouthBridge-NY '09, Macaulay Honors Program at Baruch College '13

I joined YouthBridge-NY in 2006. One of my friends from school told me about a leadership and diversity program he was part of. I asked him about the application process and he told me it had passed already and I should wait for next year. However, I would not take no for an answer and decided to call the people in charge until they let me join. After the 3rd or 4th phone call they decided to interview me and allowed me to join the program. This was one of the best choices of my life. Not only did I make great friends and professional contacts, but more importantly, I gained valuable leadership skills that I put into effect every day of my life. I learned the true value of diversity in the workplace as well as how to interact with CEO's and government officials in order to build connections that will help pave the road for a brighter future.

Overall, my experience with YouthBridge-NY was incredible. So much so, that I am now working with CAUSE-NY and am part of the YouthBridge-NY staff.

Shareen Singh, YouthBridge-NY '09, Baruch College '14

As far back as I can remember YouthBridge-NY was one of the first places where I interviewed for, let alone the stepping-stones to my first Internship, resume development, public speech and the start to the many networking events I had the honor to attend. I first heard about YouthBridge-NY through a friend who was a fellow at the time. She was always someone I looked up to because of her confidence, and after joining YouthBridge-NY I understood what made her that way. I entered the program as a quiet high school sophomore, who never really left her small community in Queens, but after joining the two-year program I began to understand that there is more to knowledge than simply attending a school.

Five years after joining YouthBridge-NY, I still think back to the tips Emily and Monica gave me on how to prepare and execute a speech or the stern grip I should always have when shaking someone's hand. The things I've learned from them will be something I will carry with me forever and I'll always think of it as a program that helped me grow into the confident empowered person I am today.

Within everyone there is a leader, weather they know it or not yet. YouthBridge-NY was my support in helping me find it.

Jacqueline Bryk, YouthBridge-NY '09, Columbia University '13

Empowered by the tremendous workplace foundation I received during my YouthBridge-NY Fellowship, I am currently working as a campus reporter for FOX News' collegiate affiliate, FNCU.

I participated in the Engaging Workplace Diversity program as a YouthBridge-NY Fellow in 2008-2009. Part of that program entailed a six-month summer internship, which I spent at Fox News. I spent the next three summers returning to FOX and building on that first initial internship.

Four years later, I am currently working at delivering my own interesting and compelling content in a stimulating form. I bring FOX's viewer attention to the amazing activity at Columbia University and draw upon my skills at script drafting, footage compressing and programming that I learned from my four summer internships at Fox. I act the part of roving reporter, preparing my commentary and getting a rare glimpse into the Columbia University scene's attention-grabbing stories and on-location events.

I credit YouthBridge-NY's uncompromising commitment to cultivating and training the leaders of tomorrow for helping me, in particular, recognize and develop my potential as a broadcast journalist.

Sean Wong, YouthBridge-NY '10, Columbia University '14

YouthBridge-NY was a transformative experience. I entered the program as an awkward, reserved sophomore with little sense of what it meant to be a leader and how to make a difference within my community. I remember how anxious I felt during the first meeting and can still feel the palpable embarrassment running through me when it was my turn to speak. Fast forward two years, and I am a vocal participant in every committee meeting, unafraid to communicate my ideas and to interact with others. Through the guidance of passionate staff members and activities attuned to my interests, I changed dramatically. Gone was the pimply teenager spooked by his own voice, replaced instead by a leader brimming with self-confidence and possessing the necessary tools to achieve whatever I set my mind to.

The best thing about YouthBridge-NY is that it has something for everyone. For me, it was getting the chance to meet prominent members of the city, learning about local and global issues, and contributing to the creation of a successful fundraiser. Others appreciated the variety of guest speakers; summer retreats; trips to green roofs, museums, and major corporations; internship opportunities—just to name a few. Regardless, every meeting was always a memorable event, serving to bring together individuals from all walks of life in order to teach and learn from each other. The fellowship gave me the opportunity to meet some of the most inspiring and interesting people in my life, many of whom I still have the pleasure of calling my friends today.

YouthBridge-NY can serve as a touchstone in every person's life. My time there was invaluable, and I can only imagine it growing and becoming more impactful in the coming years. I am truly excited to see the amazing things the program will accomplish next.

Laura Halperin, YouthBridge-NY '10, University of North Carolina-Asheville '14

YouthBridge-NY allowed me to challenge myself to accomplish more than I thought possible as a high school student. Now, as an alum, it has helped give me the courage to take opportunities I wouldn't have taken if it wasn't for my time in YouthBridge-NY.

Stella Cao, YouthBridge-NY '10, Yale University '14

As a sophomore at Yale, I can reflect back to four years ago when I just joined YouthBridge-NY. I wasn't sure what kind of community program I wanted to join, and so I searched for broad terms such as outreach and leadership programs. At first I could not conceptualize what leadership training meant and what kind of lessons YouthBridge-NY had to offer. My YouthBridge-NY class consisted of students from all five boroughs, each representing the diverse population of teenagers in New York City. We solidified into a tight knit community after attending summer retreat and were willing to share our experiences in group meetings. With the guidance of YouthBridge-NY coordinators, we learned to plan events such as high school conferences, write funding proposals, and work with other non-profit organizations. After meeting with other non-profit organizations in New York City, I was impressed by the network of activists working to make an impact on their community. By networking with these community activists, I was able to reach out and invite a speaker to Yale's Asian American Student's Alliance high school conference. As the current co-moderator of the Asian American Student's Alliance (AASA) I wanted to invite a veteran community activist to inspire high school students to initiate a positive change in their communities. Aside from organizing this conference, I have facilitated the planning of pan-Asian events, spearheaded a preprofessional mentorship program with graduate students in the Business, Law, and Medical School. One of my goals as the co-moderator of AASA is spread awareness of political issues in the Asian American community. I am appreciative of the experience that I gained from being a YouthBridge-NY Fellow. I was given the independence of planning large-scale events as a high school student and introduced to a network of amazing people.

Jesse Voreberg, YouthBridge-NY '11, Hamilton College '15

The summer after my freshman year at Hamilton College I participated in two internships. I had originally wanted to work in the wealth management division of Berkshire Bank in Massachusetts. Though they could not take on a full-time summer intern, they did offer me a part-time internship which I readily accepted. I continued searching for internship prospects for the summer and I decided to contact Adirondack Funds, a mutual fund with whom I had previously spoken on the phone regarding an investment competition. Following a conversation with their main investors, they agreed to host me as intern three days a week. I spent the summer going into Berkshire Bank once a week and Adirondack Funds three times a week. Both internships were very successful and I was invited back the next summer. I used skills I learned from YouthBridge-NY during my internship in two ways. Firstly, acquiring the internship is probably the most difficult part of the process. It can be very competitive to get a position at an investment firm as a summer intern and thus you must make yourself stand out in some way. The

networking and interviewing skills I learned at YouthBridge-NY helped me to shine and impress my potential employers during my interviews and thus helped me develop relationships with them. Additionally, I was able to carry over some basic professional skills I learned from YouthBridge-NY while at the internships. I plan on acquiring another internship during the upcoming summer, and will surely implement these skills again.

Akiva Blander, YouthBridge-NY '11, McGill University '16

Coming from a relatively sheltered community in Brooklyn, I was naturally apprehensive about joining a program whose participants would be so different from myself. During the meetings, workshops and seminars at YouthBridge, however, I learned that most differences between teens are superficial; deeper down we all have similar goals, values and interests. Thanks to YouthBridge, I feel more confident with regards to making friends and handling real-world issues, especially in an academic and work environment.

Tanjil Momo, YouthBridge-NY '12, Embry–Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach '18

YouthBridge-NY has helped me develop as a person. Before I joined YouthBridge-NY, I was very self-conscious and extremely shy to meet new people and talk in public, however, over the two years in which I participated in YouthBridge-NY, I actually popped out of this bubble that I constantly put myself into. Through YouthBridge-NY, I realized that I wasn't the only one who has faced much discrimination in this diverse city. When I heard other's stories, I realized that it is very important to be open-minded towards others, instead of quickly judging them and coming to a conclusion. I think the most valuable thing I have learned from YouthBridge-NY is being tolerant and listening to others' stories.

Through the Cultural Eye Committee, of course, I have gained some great photography skills, but most importantly, I explored various parts of New York City which had helped understand the different lifestyle that are all merged in this city. My photography project was the people's movement in NYC, therefore, it contributed greatly on breaking out of my shell and exploring the different lives of the people here.

Some other great skills which I have learned through YouthBridge-NY are definitely building up a great resume and interview skills.

YouthBridge was definitely an eye-opening experience, and if I had to do it all over again, I would participate without any hesitations. I really appreciate how YouthBridge has helped be the person that I'm today, even though I'm now not the most outgoing person, but I'm more confident to meet others and speak up about what I believe in.

Jenny Choi, YouthBridge-NY '12, Harvard University '16

Since high school senior year, I've been running a leadership program for Asian American high school women in New York City. From the ground up, I designed the curriculum, did outreach for participants, solicited donations, and facilitated the workshops. The skills I gained from being a fellow and a Bridger at YouthBridge-NY were instrumental in this process; I learned the ABCs (and more!) about grants-writing from the grants committee I sat on as a fellow, effective elevator speeches from the various skills workshops we had, and all about running an independent project under the supervision of an adult/organization from my Bridger experience. But most importantly, YBNY served as a wonderful example of what a great youth program is while I was developing my curriculum - thank you YBNY!

Victoria Elias, YouthBridge-NY '12, Buffalo State '16

Entering into YouthBridge-NY in 2010, my sophomore year in high school I came in this single minded teenage who thought I had the world figured out. Today as I continue my sophomore year at Buffalo

State, I realize how little I have figured out. I don't think I realized how much YouthBridge-NY helped me grow as an individual until after my two years were up. Going into anything you never know what to fully expect, and that's how I felt about YouthBridge but as time progressed so did I.

The greatest lesson YouthBridge taught me was how important diversity is. I attended catholic school my whole life, so really the only religion I was fully aware of was Christianity. Of course I've heard of other religions but never in a million years encountered or befriended anyone whose beliefs were different than mine. I learned so much about the kosher lifestyle and even had a few kosher meals which were quite tasty, if I might add. The most shocking revelation was when a fellow of mine who was Muslim, was partaking in Ramadan. It was an eye-opener for me to see a boy of the same age have such discipline and strength. This was the first time I realized there is so much more out there, so many people with different views and beliefs not on just religion but life itself.

Youth Bridge taught me how to interact with people of all ages and backgrounds where before I would have avoided any person who I thought I couldn't relate to. As a teenager I had this fear of anything that was different, there was this comfort I received in feeling like the world is exactly how I thought it was; but now I receive such comfort and joy from learning that the world is nothing like I thought. I now have this yearning to learn about different things, not from textbooks and lectures but from everyday people that come from all over the world, from movies that display truthful plots of countries I've never been. Today I am the girl who will go out of my way to spark a conversation with someone who has an accent or anyone who is nothing like I am. I've learned with the help of YouthBridge that the real life lessons and knowledge comes from your experiences and encounters with people.

Most people do not understand the diversity within this country until they leave that neighborhood they have lived in for the past 15 years, go to college in a different city or find a job somewhere else; I was lucky to be exposed to this at the age of 16 and today 3 years later I feel like I've met every soul there is to meet because of youth bridge (but sadly I haven't). I can say that YouthBridge has helped me grow into the well rounded young woman I am today and I thank them tremendously. I would not be where I am today without their help, so for that I thank them!

Kiran Kaul, YouthBridge-NY '14, Binghamton-Cornell '18

Before joining Youth Bridge I had never been exposed to the amount of diversity that exists in New York. By diversity I not only mean a person's ethnicity but also where they live in New York City. I was introduced to how going to school in the city is different than going to an all-girls high school. I also was passive when it came to group projects and discussions I wouldn't really participate and would stay quiet for the fear of being judged.

YBNY changed me and in a positive way. I honestly did not expect it at all I began to take control when being a part of a group project. I also began to speak up when it came to discussions and also network. I was no longer afraid to approach someone and it worked out because there I had a lot of help when going through the whole college application process. It definitely transformed me into a strong leader.

Networking was the most important thing I learned I honestly did not know how important it was to open yourself up to people who can help you and provide great insights. I will definitely use this skill throughout my life especially in college. The second thing I learned was that as a leader there are decisions made that you just have to accept. In the grant committee I remember we had a hard time on deciding what organizations to give the grant to. However, at the end we were able to make a difference with the money and even though it was a hard decision everything worked out in the end.

I had an amazing time at YBNY and I didn't realize it till now but I really grew from the retreat to our last celebration. It was great to meet so many teenagers like me from all over the city who I've bonded with. My favorite meeting was when we went to see the disabled citizens. Before that meeting I had no idea how hard it was for them and this is the reason why YBNY is so amazing because it introduces you to things you would never realize happen in New York City. Thank you also for teaching me about

everything that goes into the grant process. YBNY is an amazing eye-opening experience for any teen leader in NYC.

Monique Tinglin, YouthBridge-NY '14, American University '18

YouthBridge-NY has been a life changing experience ever since the first moment of the retreat. The twoyear fellowship allowed me to discover my passion of social justice and policy change. I was able to network with top executives, work in the Mayor's office and make long lasting friendships. Entering as a timid junior, I graduated this past spring as a confident young woman. My personal growth is credited greatly to the YouthBridge-NY experience. As I enter college this fall, I am most grateful for the amount of opportunities and exposure YouthBridge-NY provided that has made me more prepared to enter the real world.

Loma Dave, YouthBridge-NY '14, Adelphi University '18

I think I was more reserved before YBNY and there were people of different nationalities that I hadn't met yet. They all seemed very exotic to me, but once I got to know them I realized that NYC is way more diverse than the Latinos and Blacks that lived in neighborhoods other than mine. I wasn't much of a leader and I don't think I would have used the leadership skills within me if YBNY hadn't helped to bring those qualities out in me. It was a learning experience and a fun extension to school. If I had to do it over again, I would do it the exact same way and I wouldn't change a thing. YBNY helped make the last two years of high school the best years of my life. If there was anything I learned, it was how to network and a lot of basic career advice like what to do at an interview and how to make a resume. If it weren't for YBNY, I wouldn't have known how to advance my career and reach out to people who could have helped me in the future.

Bianca Thankur, YouthBridge-NY '21, Fordham University '25

Something I learned from my time at YouthBridge is to make sure to learn about other people's unique experiences. As a Fellow and Bridger, I have had the opportunity to engage with those from different cultures, backgrounds, and religions. These interactions have helped me become a more open-minded individual and have enabled me to think from a more broader perspective.

Tiffany Zhong, YouthBridge-NY '21, Princeton University '25

For me, YouthBridge is a program that allowed me to step out of the bubble I have often been in. The two hours I spent monthly at YouthBridge opened me up to the 'melting pot' of a city that I had yet to explore for the majority of my life. I was raised in a Chinese-dominant neighborhood when I was younger and currently live in an area with a large Asian population. Thus, I have often been surrounded by people that shared similar values or ideas. YouthBridge has offered me a chance to get to know a variety of people. I've looked forward to the different perspectives that people share on the same topic during our meetings. We teens are able to incorporate a multitude of cultures, beliefs, and ideologies to understand more perspectives in life, rather than the small population I have always been near. And as promised, YouthBridge has added the word 'diversity' to my vocabulary, holding a space of unity for us teens, and leaving me hungry for more discussions.

Hassan Saab, YouthBridge-NY '21, New York University '25

Something that I will take away from my experiences at YouthBridge would have to be leadership skills. I know it sounds generic, but I learned my capabilities and how to use these leadership skills to help others and to help myself as well. Because of YouthBridge, I feel ready for what's coming next, and I feel ready for my future.