



It's Our Future

2021 Year End Report from Seven Generations Ahead



It's Our Future (IOF) is a youth-driven project of Seven Generations Ahead (SGA) designed to empower Chicago area youth to advocate for climate solutions and their futures. The program achieves its goals by fostering community among youth, educating them about climate justice, building their advocacy skills, connecting them to the national and global youth climate movement, and creating opportunities to take action within their own communities, schools and institutions. IOF especially seeks to engage and empower youth of color as we strive to make a collective impact. IOF works primarily with high school youth who guide

all of its program components. Youth host and attend educational events; produce editorials; craft and deliver presentations to school and village boards; plan and host film screenings; create and implement youth summits; meet with community leaders to advocate for solutions; and participate in international climate forums including the UN Climate Summit.

Engagement

It's Our Future is expanding its reach beyond Oak Park and River Forest to include youth in Chicago, Evanston and other suburbs. Recruiting presentations were made at Northside College Prep, Al Raby High School, Evanston Township High School (ETHS) and Oak Park River Forest High School (OPRFHS). Youth engaged over 100 new followers on Instagram. The IOF Youth Leadership Team and the Adult Advisory Council meet monthly.

Advocacy

In 2021 IOF youth made persuasive presentations to:

- The Chicago Board of Education in support of CPS Goes Solar!
- Evanston City Council, urging implementation of its Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP).
- District 202 School Board and Evanston's City/Schools Liaison Committee asking for the appointment of a Sustainability Coordinator at ETHS and climate literacy for all students.
- District 200 School Board, urging them to install solar panels at OPRFHS.
- Oak Park Village Board in support of the 7 Van Buren Project, a proposed net zero energy building being developed by the Oak Park Residence Corporation.
- Village governments, in collaboration with the Interfaith Green Network, advocating for "opt out" residential food scrap composting programs.

Additionally, It's Our Future youth held forums for Village of Oak Park Presidential Candidates and Village of River Forest Presidential and Trustee Candidates, drawing 100 attendees. IOF youth serve on the District 200 Sustainability Committee and Evanston's CARP Implementation Task Force and met with Evanston's Mayor Biss and the Superintendents of ETHS and OPRFHS.

Education

It's Our Future youth are always learning and in turn, educating their communities.

Youth engaged in educational forums throughout the year on Amazon Rainforest Policy and Strategy; Local Sustainable Food Projects Across the State; Marketing of Climate Focused Food; Urban Agriculture in Chicago; Net Zero Energy Buildings; and Youth Activism.

Several IOF youth are Climate Reality Leaders, trained by Al Gore. They gave presentations to the Interfaith Green Network, the PlanItGreen Leaders Forum, and Chicago area youth, on advocacy for greenhouse gas emissions reductions in our communities in addition to numerous presentations about their experience at COP26.

Strategic Partners

It's Our Future youth serve as liaisons.

Several It's Our Future youth have leadership roles with adjacent organizations and help to recruit and educate others through these platforms. These include the Chicago Climate Youth Coalition, Sunrise Chicago, Etown Sunrise, Mikvah Challenge, the OPRFHS Environmental Club. Additional partners include the Interfaith Green Network, Citizens' Greener Evanston, The River Forest Sustainability Commission and Climate Reality Chicago.

Collaboration with One Earth Film Festival

It's Our Future partners with the One Earth Film Festival's Youth Advisory Council to recruit volunteers, support workshops, and take part in film selection and community screenings across the Chicago metro area. IOF youth serve on this council with youth from across the U.S., and participate in bi-monthly meetings leading up to the March festival. The team helped to organize and facilitate panel discussions as part of youth film screenings for the films *Youth v. Gov* and *I am Greta* which drew 160 attendees.

The One Earth Film Festival's Youth Advisory Council organized a livestream event featuring IOF youth at COP26 which featured this [interview compilation](#). The event drew 100 attendees. There was also a segment in which youth in the U.S. interviewed their peers about what they know about the climate crisis and where they learned it, highlighting a need for climate education in schools. The event closed with the youth in Glasgow interviewing youth delegates from Panama and the island nation of The Seychelles, countries that are highly impacted by climate change.



Upon return to the U.S., two IOF youth were part of a “talk back” at a screening of *Youth v. Gov* as part of Facets Multimedia's Children's International Film Festival and in collaboration with One Earth Collective.

COP 26

It's Our Future took a delegation of nine to COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland in November of 2021 as part of Seven Generations Ahead's role as an official Observer Organization of the UN Climate Summit. The delegation included five youth: three from Oak Park, one from Evanston and one from Chicago, as well as two Chicago Public School teachers and two SGA staff members.

Preparations for COP26 included orientation for students and chaperones and educational sessions to prepare them to engage, understand and report back on what they learned. SGA Communications Director, Liz Lukehart conducted a workshop on interview skills and storytelling.



Once there, youth attended sessions with top level speakers and were in close proximity to delegates including U.S. Cabinet members; former Vice President Al Gore; Bill Gates; presidents and prime ministers of many nations; and a representative of the Kingdom of Tonga. They also met with youth activists from across the globe including Leah Thomas (The Intersectional Environmentalist) and Xiya Bastida, whose essay is featured in the anthology *All We Can Save*. One youth, Charlotte Meyer, had a special meeting with Illinois Governor, J.B. Pritzker. Youth attended the climate strikes in Glasgow as well, where they heard from Greta

Thunberg and others.

The trip to COP26 offered a platform for IOF youth, who were interviewed by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC); National Public Radio (NPR) London; and NY1/Spectrum News. Chicago area coverage included interviews in *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Chicago Tribune's Oak Leaves*, *The Evanston RoundTable*, *Dear Evanston*, school papers, and this [Guest Essay](#) by Charlotte Meyer in the *River Forest Village News* in addition to appearances on Chicago Tonight and CAN TV.



Since returning from Glasgow, youth have shared what they've learned with classes and clubs at their schools as well as the Climate Reality Chicago Chapter, Rotary Clubs, churches, Citizens' Greener Evanston, and the PlanItGreen Leaders Forum in addition to the board presentations mentioned above.

Impact

With youth now very publicly participating on the local, national and international level, their impact on our communities has been large. In addition to the substantial public education impact of It's Our Future, youth advocacy efforts have advanced just solutions to the climate crisis locally. The candidates' forums sent a clear message that sustainability is a top issue for local youth. Oak Park and River Forest Sustainability Commissions are studying the proposed "Opt-out" composting program recommendation made by the IOF youth. ETHS is forming a Climate Curriculum Committee. Chicago Public Schools leaders are enthusiastic about expanding solar capacity at schools. It's Our Future provides a community where youth climate leaders collaborate, learn and truly make an impact on their communities, the world and their futures.