



# It's Our Future

2022 Year End Report from Seven Generations Ahead



2022 was a banner year for *It's Our Future* (IOF), a youth-driven project of Seven Generations Ahead (SGA) that empowers Chicago area youth to advocate for climate solutions and their futures. The program has three focus areas: Advocacy, Education and Connection. IOF attains its goals through an authentic Youth-Adult Partnership Model in which high school youth guide all of its program components. IOF youth build advocacy skills; learn and teach others about the climate crisis and its solutions; and connect with other young people (and adults) who share their worries,

passion and determination. IOF is a welcoming and inclusive space, actively seeking and welcoming BIPOC youth as we strive to make a collective impact. A capstone of our work is our annual trip to the United Nations Climate Conference, or Conference of the Parties (COP). This year, COP28 was held in Sharm el Sheik, Egypt where the IOF delegation had a formative experience and brought their learnings back to Chicagoland, where they have a platform to influence policy.

## Advocacy

**In 2022 IOF youth made several persuasive and impactful presentations.**

- IOF youth were part of a team, including SGA staff and administrators from Oak Park River Forest High School (OPRFHS) District 200, that crafted a comprehensive sustainability policy for the district. Youth researched existing school sustainability policies which informed the process. The policy is now serving as a model for other school districts.
- OPRF Junior, Manolo Avalos, spoke to the school board of District 97 about the need for them to follow District 200's example, and craft a climate policy for the district. You can read his remarks [here](#).
- Sydney Jackson, Outreach Consultant for the Sustainability Office of Oak Park met with youth affinity groups to get their input on the Climate Ready Plan.
- IOF youth spoke to the Evanston Township High School (ETHS) Board of Education urging them to hire a sustainability coordinator. The district has since hired their first *Director of Operations and Sustainability*. Read Lily Aaron's remarks [here](#). Additionally, the school has formed a Climate Curriculum Committee with support from IOF youth.

- IOF youth spoke to the Evanston City Council urging them to pass a [Climate Emergency Resolution](#), and to fund and implement the city's Climate Action and Resilience Plan more rapidly. The declaration passed unanimously.
- IOF youth and the teacher delegate to COP26 spoke at the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Board of Education meeting and received the board's *Honor of Excellence Award*.

## Education

**It's Our Future youth are always learning and educating their communities.**

**In 2022 IOF co-hosted three well-attended and highly engaging events:**

- *Youth v. Gov: Activists in Conversation* featured a panel of youth plaintiffs featured in the documentary film *Youth v. Gov*, about a group of young people who are suing the federal government for inaction on climate change. The event, held at the Garfield Park Conservatory in partnership with [One Earth Collective \(OEC\)](#), was attended by 27 youth in-person and 77 people online.
- *Window into COP27* was a livestream event broadcast from Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, in partnership with [Climate Generation](#) and OEC. IOF youth delegates spoke about their COP experience to an audience of over 100 people, including several high school classes and environmental clubs.
- *Stories from COP27: a Youth Climate Mixer* was a hybrid event, also co-hosted with [OEC](#). Youth delegates reflected on their COP experience and shared their key takeaways. Then 40+ students from ETHS, OPRF, Solorio Academy in Chicago, and others ate tacos and brainstormed goals in a "world cafe" style session. Their ideas are guiding the coming year for IOF programming. This event also had an online audience of 80 people.



**IOF had dynamic presenters at our monthly online meetings including:** Evanston Mayor, Daniel Biss and Sustainability Coordinator, Cara Pratt; CPS Sustainability Coordinator, Sandrine Schultz and Oak Park Community Engagement Consultant, Sydney Jackson, and others.

**IOF youth presented to a variety of audiences including:** The PlanIt Green Forum, the Interfaith Green Network, the Lighthouse Rotary Club of Evanston, the OPRF Environmental Club, Etown Sunrise, the Zero Waste Ambassadors as well as several of their classes.

**IOF youth were in the news including:** an interview on [WBEZ](#)'s Reset, an article in the [Wednesday Journal](#) as well as an [OpEd by Manolo Avalos](#), and one in the [Evanston RoundTable](#).

**IOF youth also educated people through social media:** A youth-led Social Media Committee increased followers and strategized about content on Instagram - @iofyouth

## Connection

**IOF youth work together with several collaborating organizations including:** One Earth Collective, Climate Generation, The Climate Reality Project, Sunrise Movement, Chicago Youth Climate Coalition, Fridays For Future, and the environmental clubs and sustainability offices in their schools and communities

IOF youth have cited the opportunity to connect with and learn from other schools as a highlight of the program. There has been an increase in youth from Hinsdale, Riverside and other suburban communities, seeking to learn how to move the dial towards sustainability and climate action in their schools and communities.

## COP27

**Attending the United Nations Climate Conference in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt was a formative experience for the IOF youth delegation. Several of them have referred to it as a truly “life changing” experience. You can read their dispatches on the [SGA Website](#).**

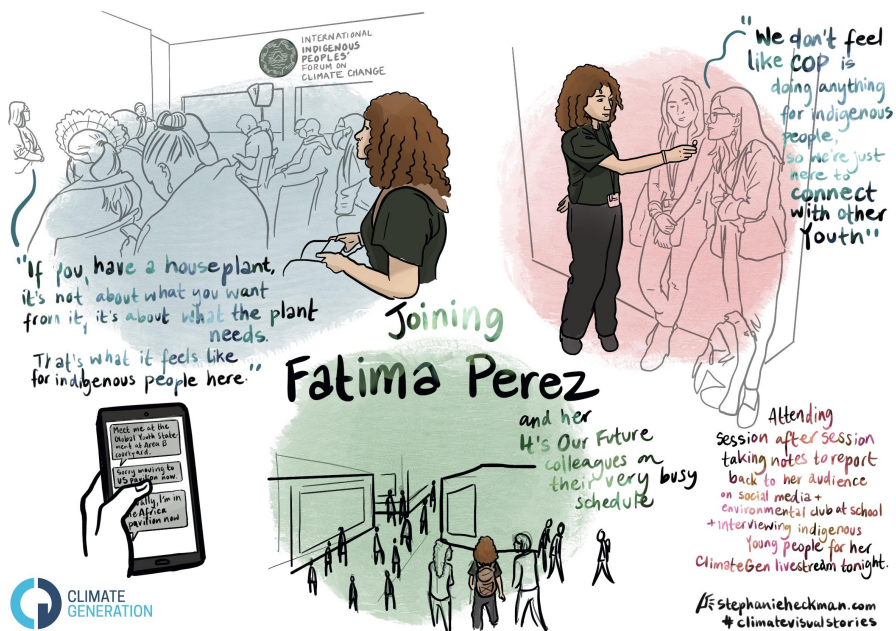
**Here are a few highlights:**

- The IOF Delegation was invited to an intimate reception with Former Vice President Al Gore. The youth heard his inspiring remarks, reminding them that “political will is a renewable resource.” OPRFHS Senior, Tori Evans had the opportunity to interview the former Vice President).
- Youth Delegates, Emmet Ebels-Duggan and Antonio Padilla, interviewed White House Advisor, John Podesta. Antonio was in a small session of youth in conversation with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry. Delegates attended sessions with Senators Markey, Merkle and Whitehouse among others.
- IOF’s Manolo Avalos got to attend the New York Times Climate Hub with Greta Kringle, a Golden Apple Award winning science teacher from Solorio Academy in Chicago who was part of our delegation. There, Manolo had the opportunity to interview Climate Scientist and Communicator, Dr. Katherine Hayhoe.
- IOF youth delegates were especially impressed with the presence of youth and indigenous leaders at the conference, frequenting the Youth and Children’s Pavilion, the Climate Justice Pavilion, the Africa Pavilion and the Indigenous Pavilion.
- On daily shuttle bus rides from the hotel to the venue, youth were tasked with starting conversations with fellow delegates from around the world, which they did, making connections with many leaders from frontline countries.





- As part of IOF and SGA's Partnership with Climate Generation, Fatima Perez was followed by a visual notetaker, who created an illustration of Fatima's day.



## Testimonials

At the PlanIt Green Forum, Former Oak Park Mayor David Pope shared the fact that then OPRF Senior, Sophie Ball, literally **flipped the vote** of the planning commission, ensuring the approval of an historic Net Zero Energy Building. David followed up with this [glowing testimonial](#).

In response, Sophie shared the following:

*I am currently leading a project to ensure that within 3 years, everyone at the university will receive some form of sustainability education in their formal curriculum. My experiences at IOF have helped tremendously in brainstorming solutions and having the leadership and speaking skills necessary to be successful with this project.*

**Here are some responses from a recent survey asking youth what they love about It's Our Future:**

*I love the fact that we are young people with WIDELY different things going on in our schools and have different experiences/knowledge. Yet, somehow, we are still able to come together to contribute to one shared goal/project. It's this diversity that allows us to brainstorm so much.*

*In comparison to another organization I participate in, I feel that IOF is a lot more collaborative and productive at meetings. I almost never feel like meetings are wasting time.*