



# It's Our Future

2023 Year End Report from Seven Generations Ahead



*It's Our Future* (IOF), the youth-driven sustainability leadership program of Seven Generations Ahead (SGA) empowers students to advocate for climate justice policies and solutions in their schools and communities while supporting one another as they face the magnitude and gravity of the climate crisis. IOF is an intentionally welcoming and inclusive space, currently

serving youth from ten different Chicago area high schools from a wide variety of backgrounds as we strive to make a collective impact. Through an authentic Youth-Adult Partnership Model, youth guide all IOF program components.

In 2023 IOF youth forged a strong sense of community empowering one another to successfully advocate and change policy. They educated their communities about climate justice and solutions. A capstone of the program is the annual trip to the United Nations Climate Conference, or Conference of the Parties (COP).

## COP28

**IOF brought six students from five different high schools to the United Nations Climate Conference (COP28) in Dubai, UAE with one goal:**

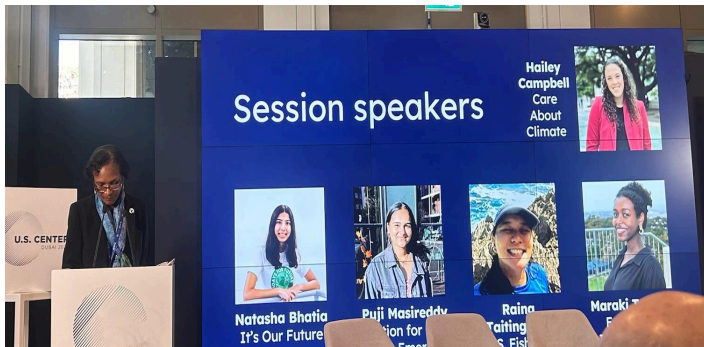
**activation.** The youth were activated by the experience and have leveraged it to activate and educate their peers and communities and to advocate for stronger climate policies. It is very rare to see high school students at COP and they were sought after as essential youth voices. You can read their dispatches on the [SGA Website](#).

### Here are a few highlights:

- For the first time, IOF youth crafted proposals for panels to **present at COP-** and all of them were accepted! The panels were as follows:
  - *Anxiety, Apathy and Action: Youth Mental Health in the face of Climate Disaster* was a moving and engaging panel in which youth shared their feelings of anger, fear, despair, guilt and loneliness brought about by the climate crisis. They went on to share that they are greatly helped by having a community of like-minded peers, and by working together to make a difference, both of which they say they get from IOF.
  - *Climate Literacy into Climate Justice* highlighted the fact that Climate Education is the number one climate solution and is essential to addressing youth mental health and combat misinformation from social media and “doom scrolling.”

[\(Columbia University\)](#)

- *School Lunches as a Tool for Youth Empowerment* focused on how reducing waste and sourcing food locally supports students in behaviors that they know are the right way to protect the planet.
- Katie Stabb presented about IOF as part of a panel hosted by Peace Boat featuring several youth organizations.
- Tasha Bhatia was on a panel at the US Pavilion, hosted by the State Department, entitled *Dear World Leaders* in which youth activists were on stage and key US officials were in the front row, including the heads of NOAA, the Smithsonian, and the State Department's Special Envoy for Youth Engagement, Abby Finkeneuer.



- IOF youth participated an intimate Roundtable discussion with these administrators.
- IOF delegates were invited to meet with Deputy Secretary of Energy, David Turk, where they brought excellent questions and learned a lot.
- The group attended a special reception hosted by [Axios Media](#) where they heard a powerful interview with **Al Gore** (pictured right). The students then interviewed Allen Blue, the co-founder of LinkedIn about Climate Careers and Senior Climate Reporter, Andrew Freeman about the role of journalism.
- Danica Sun attended the Local Conference of Youth in Washington, DC to help craft a youth statement that would ultimately be presented to the leadership at COP.



## Education

It's Our Future youth are constantly learning about climate justice and in turn educating their peers and communities. This includes the COP experience and more.

- [Youth Voices from COP28](#) was a livestream event broadcast from Dubai in partnership with [Climate Generation](#) and One Earth Collective. IOF youth delegates shared their COP experience with a focus on *activation* to an audience of **over 200 people**, including high school and middle school classes and clubs.
- IOF youth were central to planning and leading youth programming at the GreenTown Climate and Equity Conference in June which was attended by 150 youth as well as hundreds of adults including mayors and sustainability professionals. Youth spoke at a plenary session and a press conference, and facilitated several engaging activities for youth



- IOF youth presented to a variety of audiences including: Third Graders in the Roots and Shoots club in Evanston, middle schoolers at two Oak Park Schools and at the Franklin STEAM academy in Champaign, Illinois in addition to students in classes and clubs at their own schools. They also presented to leaders at The Plant Green Forum, the Interfaith Green Network, and Fair Oaks Church.
- Students worked hard to craft a Resource Guide to help others push for climate policy in their schools. It should be live in 2024.
- Students spoke at the Oak Park School of Rock's *Rock the World* which raised funds for IOF.
- The social media team increased followers and engagement on Instagram @IOFyouth.
- IOF students were trained in public speaking at a workshop with Executive Coach, Anne Linehan.
- Guest speakers at IOF meetings included Uili Luisi and COP delegate from the Kingdom of Tonga and Wynton Jones of the Urban Efficiency Group.

## In the News

IOF garnered a great deal of media attention in 2023. The team at WBEZ's Reset, having worked with IOF before, reached out when they needed youth voices to discuss the youth lawsuit in Montana. Subsequently they ran a series about IOF youth at COP including daily dispatches. Additionally, IOF youth made the front page of the Chicago Tribune. All of this coverage helped to raise awareness about the climate crisis and the importance of youth voices in working towards solutions. Find links to the stories [HERE](#).



## Advocacy

**In 2023, youth leveraged their COP experience and the skills they gained through IOF to change policy in their school districts and beyond.**

- Having successfully helped to pass a comprehensive climate policy at Oak Park River Forest High School (OPRFHS) District 200, IOF youth are now part of the team that crafts and implements a report card system, holding administrators accountable for implementing the policy.
- IOF students successfully advocated for a similar policy at District 97, Oak Park's Kindergarten through 8th grade school district 97.
- IOF students successfully helped to pass a similar school sustainability policy at Evanston Township High School (ETHS), led by IOF students and the Director of Facilities and Sustainability (who was hired last year at the urging of IOF youth) administrators, teachers and SGA staff.
- IOF youth also advocated successfully to establish a Climate Curriculum Committee at ETHS comprised of 17 teachers plus students and administrators. They are focused on ensuring that all students get a foundational education around climate justice, through freshman Biology and sophomore Civics classes.
- IOF youth met with teachers and administrators at Hinsdale Central High School, Riverside Brookfield High School and the Illinois Math and Science Academy in hopes of moving these schools toward climate policies as well.
- IOF youth have joined forces with [Climate Education for Illinois](#) and have met with State Representatives and other leaders to work for statewide climate justice education for all students, similar to what's passed in New Jersey and other states.

## Connection

**IOF youth work together with several collaborating organizations including:** The US ACE Coalition, Climate Education for Illinois, One Earth Collective, Green Generation, 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.