

IN THEIR VOICES

MORE INSIGHTS FROM THE YOUTH OF HERITAGE PARK

By empowering youth to take the reins in identifying what they need and want, and crafting their own vision for creating community; resilience, confidence and life skills are reinforced.

Promoting Positive Youth Outcomes in Mixed-Income Developments, 2020

The [Green Garden Bakery at Heritage Park](#) in Minneapolis, Minnesota stands out among efforts to [promote positive youth development in mixed-income communities](#). In July 2021, NIMC checked in with two young leaders at Heritage Park, **D'Loveantae** and **Elicia**, to catch up on their experiences at the Green Garden Bakery and learn more about it has impacted their lives. Their reflections highlighted three themes: youth voice, personal growth and connectedness. These themes point to the impact that positive youth development can have not only on the youth themselves, but on entire communities.

YOUTH VOICE

The youth shared that a major experience of the previous month was that the Mayor of Minneapolis had visited the Bakery for a tour and discussion with the youth. The Mayor asked the youth questions about how the bakery got started, how they developed their recipes,



and their future vision for the bakery and for their own lives. Reflecting on this experience, D'Loveantae shared, "It's more powerful when youth speak to problems. Adults are made to endure those problems, but children shouldn't have to go through that. When a youth talks about problems in the city, there's a different impact." D'Loveantae, Elicia, and their Bakery team used the opportunity to raise several community needs they felt were critical. The needs ranged from working buzzers for apartments and speed bumps for traffic control to a walking bridge over the nearby highway that separated the housing development. The youth felt empowered to be able to speak directly to the Mayor of the City about their concerns and they felt heard.



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PERSONAL GROWTH

The youth had gained great confidence and self-esteem from their successful work at the Bakery, but the Mayor's visit was a new, high profile experience. Elicia shared that she was nervous about leading the team baking for the Mayor's visit. Then she remembered that she's a great cook and he'll enjoy the treats. "I've got this," she told herself. "He's just like everyone else." When the visit went smoothly and the Mayor enjoyed the baked goods, it expanded their sense of their role in the community and the city.

Nurturing the next generation of youth leaders is a key role at the Bakery. As new youth come to work at Green Garden Bakery, the seasoned employees such as D'Loveantae and Elicia are ready to train them up. "Right now Brandon is shadowing me and learning sales. I love to get folks involved and get them going," shared D'Loveantae. Elicia is teaching a new group of teens at the bakery how to prep vegetables and bake. "It's been a good opportunity to work on my leadership skills and how I interact with people. Teaching them all these new things has been a fun experience." The youth also acknowledged that it could be challenging to work with the younger folks. "When new youth are struggling, I have to remember to be patient. In our diverse neighborhood, I have to remember that they're coming from somewhere different. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone knows or doesn't know. For some folks, English is a second language," shared D'Loveantae.

Summarizing what she's learned before she heads off to college, Elicia noted, "I was shy when I started out. I came in and did my job. I've grown a lot. I'm better at public speaking and interacting with people. I can achieve and do more in life. I was holding myself back before I was here. Now I know I can grow and thrive."

CONNECTEDNESS

After the Mayor's visit, the Green Garden Bakery crew had plenty of extra desserts left over. They decided to use them for some community

outreach. They distributed them at the library, partnering with another local organization focused on youth leadership and food security. The whole experience was "so sweet and heartwarming," Elicia remembered.

While there is strong connectedness between youth working at the bakery, and youth with the adults associated with the bakery, the youth expressed that they do not feel as much belonging and respect from other adults throughout the neighborhood as they would like. The bakery provides an important hub of connection. A key question remains how that connection can be broadened further into the community.

Reflecting on last year's brutal killing of George Floyd not far away from Heritage Park, Elicia shared that community members are having "deeper conversations about race, how we feel about ourselves and each other. It has opened up conversations we wouldn't have had before. A positive outcome of this tragic situation was more connectedness."

The conversation with Elicia and D'Loveantae generated some key questions to be considered as community change efforts continue to create space and dedicate resources to promote positive youth development in mixed-income communities:

- What more can be done to lift up the voices of youth and encourage them to share their thoughtful ideas of ways to improve the community?
- How can we be more intentional to foster intergenerational leadership among youth? How can we help more seasoned youth pass on their skills, knowledge, and commitment to the next round of youth?
- How can we help foster broader community connectedness between youth and adults beyond the confines of specific youth programs?