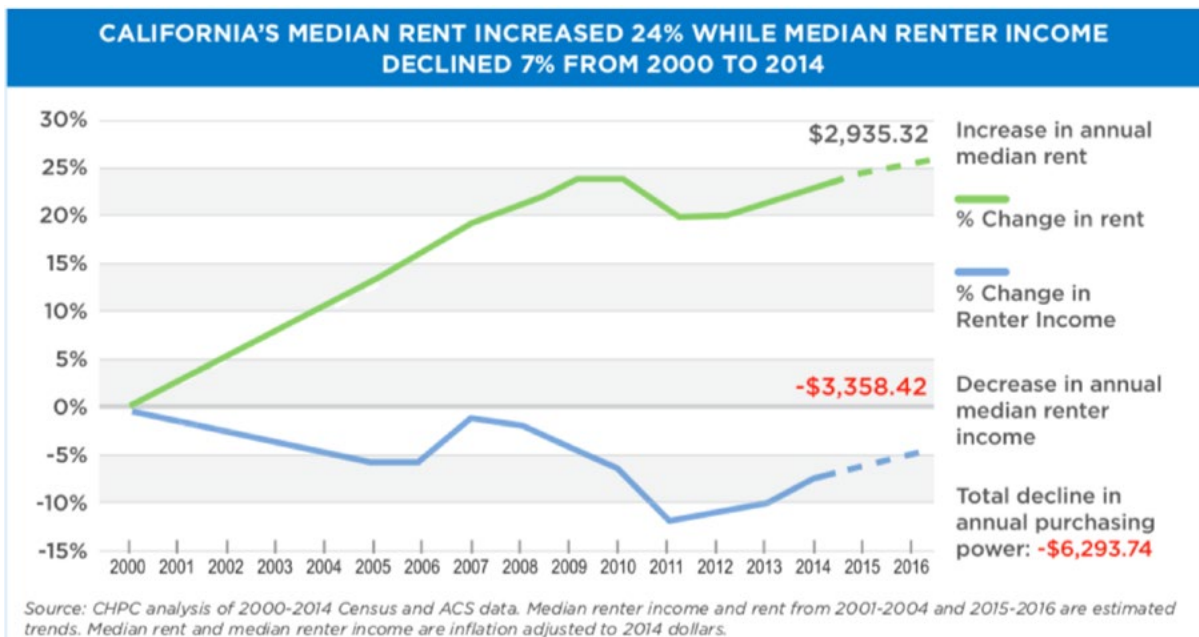




Y-PLAN Housing Policy Brief

California is facing an unprecedented housing crisis. Young people across the state feel its pressures, and they know how to help.

Y-PLAN Youth InSight: Housing

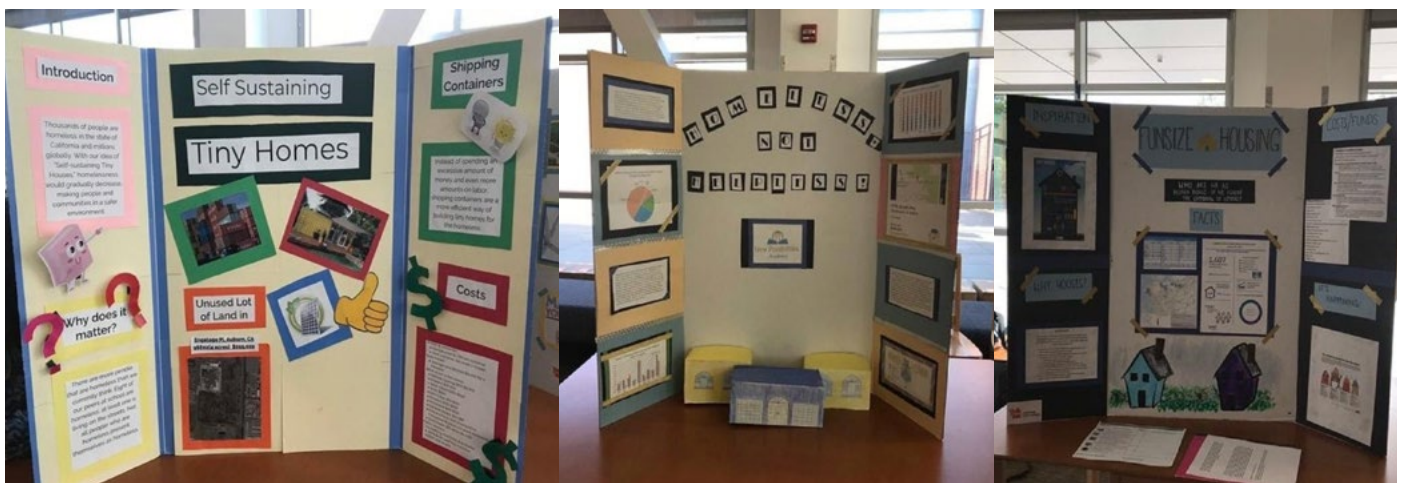


INTRODUCTION

Since taking office, California Governor Newsom has named the statewide housing crisis a top priority of his administration, asserting that the “... **high price of housing and rent makes it almost impossible for many families to live in the communities where they work**” ([CA Gov. Press Release](#)). He is absolutely correct. Statewide, median rents have increased 24% from 2000 to 2014 while median income of renters fell 7% over that same period ([California Housing Partnership Corporation](#)). The issue is especially dire in San Francisco, where **rents have climbed by up to 18% since 2014** ([Curbed SF](#)). In the East Bay, Oakland has also struggled; in 2017, almost half of all households were identified as cost-burdened, meaning they commit more than 30% of their household yearly income to housing costs alone ([PolicyLink](#)). Oakland’s Mayor **Libby Schaaf has stated that “housing is a human right,”** echoing the cries of many housing justice advocates and the Alameda County Public Health Department ([CBS SF BayArea](#)).

As much as these politicians can speak to the descriptive statistics of the crisis, they cannot speak to the lived experience of persons and families currently grappling with its realities. The young scholars of the [Y-PLAN](#) (Youth - Plan Learn Act Now!) civic learning initiative can do just that. **These young scholars, primarily low-income young people of color, are uniquely situated to offer valuable insight regarding the housing crisis and potential solutions.** Combining their lived experience within their community with data collected through the Y-PLAN research process, the scholars produce policy recommendations in dialogue and collaboration with civic leaders. Some recommendations, such as increased housing supply with affordability restrictions, mirror initiatives currently supported at the municipal, county, and state levels. Others, like a special graduation ceremony for high school students living in temporary housing, are all together new, underscoring the value of youth voices in planning discourse. Further, Y-PLAN’s process of connecting student scholars with civic leaders (their “clients”) has enabled some of their recommendations to be actualized.

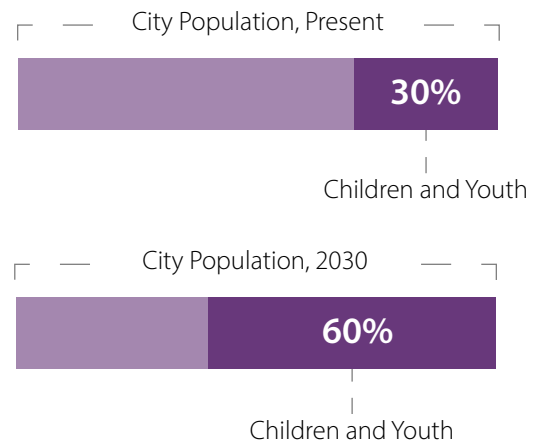
Assembled from Y-PLAN projects in New York City, the Bay Area, and Sacramento, these findings repeatedly emphasized **Housing Affordability/Supply, Innovation in Housing Policy and Form, Stability/Tenant Protections, and Support for Unhoused People.** Looking forward, Y-PLAN’s work will be largely focused in California, wherein 95.5% of young people live in urban areas (American Community Survey), but continues to include participants from across the globe (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Sept. 2018).



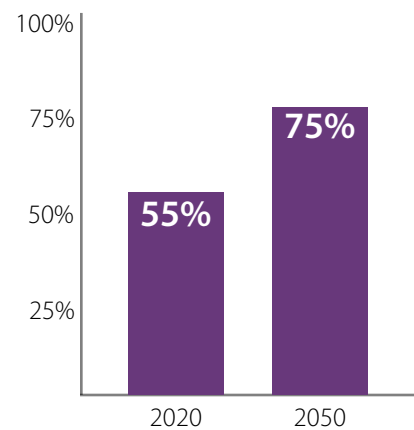
METHODOLOGY

Today, children and youth often comprise more than 30% of a city's population. Demographers predict that number will rise to 60% by 2030 (ARUP). Still, they are rarely incorporated into formal, meaningful planning and policy making conversations and processes. **Projections hold that three quarters of the entire population is expected to live in cities by 2050**, so the exclusion of young people is only going to grow more apparent as our world continues to urbanize. While planners may consider how to plan *FOR* young people, rarely do they plan *WITH* young people at the table.

Y-PLAN, housed within the UC-Berkeley Center for Cities + Schools, uses a five-step participatory action research methodology to prepare entire classes of students to address authentic civic problems posed to them by city leaders, flipping the script of project- and work-based learning. These questions are posed to students with the belief that these city challenges could only be solved in conjunction with young people. Y-PLAN prioritizes the voices of low-income, young people of color in planning for cities now and in the future.



Global Population Residing in Cities, Now vs. 2050



Right-Sizing Housing



Y-PLAN scholars advocate for “right-sized” housing typologies that suit modern needs and wants, such as:

- *Accessory Dwelling Units*
- *In-Law Suites*
- *Capsule Housing*
- *Tiny Homes for the Unhoused*

The term “right-sizing” has gained popularity in planning discourse in recent years, positing that single-family homes may not be everyone’s desired scale of abode, especially if they necessitate living far from an urban core. As such, there is a movement to provide a greater variety of housing units and configurations to better match changing desires, especially in urban markets where square footage is very costly. **Right-sizing housing aims to provide more housing units at lower costs with better access to other amenities.**

In this vein, Y-PLAN student scholars consistently advocate for **Accessory Dwelling Units** and **In-law Suites** as options to increase the supply of “right-sized” housing units. In the San Francisco Peninsula, students specified that these smaller units could be rented to “young, single tech workers” while the larger homes could house multi-generational families living together. These recommendations included changing zoning codes to make the construction process less onerous – AB68, just signed into law by Governor Newsom, hopefully will advance this goal in California. Students also advocated for **Capsule Housing**, like pod hotels and dorm-style living, which are popping up across American cities today, in an effort to get more people housed quickly and at lower cost.

Students at Balboa High School in San Francisco even proposed a **cross-subsidy in such a development, using funds generated from tourist-rented pods to provide units to long-time residents.** While these types of micro-units might not appeal to all people, students view them as a means to decrease competition for larger units while providing opportunities for community building through the use of shared amenities, like kitchens and recreational spaces.

According to Governor Newsom, homelessness is “a national emergency that demands more than just words, it demands action” ([CA Gov. Press Release](#)). Y-PLAN student scholars are concerned about their unhoused peers and neighbors and see providing housing as a logical first step in solving the emergency. Students see **Tiny Homes** as a practical solution. They envisioned programs in which unhoused people could learn to build their own tiny homes to provide a **sense of ownership and opportunity for skill building**, as well as the creation of tiny home communities on formerly vacant lots where “wrap around services” would be offered. The latter suggestion is reminiscent of Oakland’s [Tuff Shed](#) initiative, which locates tiny homes on vacant municipal land and connects residents with amenities and social services.

Policy Supports for Low-Income Residents



Y-PLAN students recommend policy supports for low-income residents, including:

- **Tenant Protections**
- **Access to Tenant's Rights Information**
- **Centralized Information Portals**
- **Airbnb Usage Tax**
- **Homebuyer Assistance Programs**
- **Home Repair for Seniors**

Y-PLAN student scholars also articulated the need to pursue policies that would allow low-income residents, who are at risk of displacement, to stay long-term in their communities. Students, and residents in their communities that they surveyed, repeatedly voiced concerns about eviction and rising housing costs. While Governor Newsom signed AB1482 into law in October 2019 limiting rent increases to 5% annually plus local inflation rates, students expressed concerns that rent control without adequate **Tenant Protections** and **Access to Information** will leave low-income residents, and undocumented populations in particular, vulnerable.

To tackle this issue, students advocated for **Centralizing Information** for tenants and for unhoused people, so that they would know what rights and resources are available to them without having to face unnecessary hurdles such as office visits, long wait times, and contact with the legal system. **Students suggested online portals and an amplified social media presence for these resources**, as many teenagers utilize social media and could provide information to their parents. Awareness is a significant issue, as many supports exist that people do not know about – this was the impetus behind 211 LA, a 24/7 phone line that serves as “a central source for providing information and referrals for all health and human services in LA County” (211la.org).

Y-PLAN student scholars also supported the implementation and expansion of several policy initiatives across California, including a **Usage Fee or Tax on Airbnb** unit owners and users, which would subsidize affordable housing production, **Home Repair Assistance for Seniors**, to allow elders to age in place, and **Low-Income Homebuyer Assistance Programs** to explicitly support current residents and former residents who have been displaced. **These initiatives would promote community stability by assisting low-income locals to buy units and remain connected to their social and spatial networks.** Students from East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Redwood City have already seen some of their ideas, such as ADU loan assistance for low-income homeowners, be implemented in [pilot programs](#) and want to remain involved to ensure their other proposals are considered as well.

Public Space and Shared Community



Y-PLAN scholars know that housing developments need to build a sense of community by:

- **Providing Space for Community**
 - **Shared Kitchens**
 - **Rooftop Gardens**
 - **Amenities (Childcare, Groceries)**
 - **Plazitas**
- **Streetscape Improvements**
 - **Adequate Waste and Recycling Receptacles**
 - **Affordable Transit**

Y-PLAN student scholars consistently question the boundaries drawn between planning sectors. They see housing as part of a larger ecosystem, as they navigate the city in a number of roles – as a resident, a student, a caretaker, and a consumer, to name a few. To this end, **many projects did not limit their recommendations solely to the provision of housing**, even when that was all their client specifically asked.

Students took a holistic approach and recommended the **Co-location of Key Amenities** with housing, including access to healthy food via grocery stores, rooftop gardens, and community kitchens; relevant services such as laundry and childcare; common recreational spaces as well as quiet spaces; and affordable and accessible transit services.

Students from East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy recommended increasing the supply of extremely low-income affordable housing (30% Area Median Income), but they also advocated for **Streetscape Improvements**, more **waste and recycling receptacles**, and the creation of a **Plazita**. The Plazita would transform an identified vacant lot into a public plaza that celebrates the Latino culture in East Palo Alto, with incentives for local residents to become both vendors and patrons of the space, creating a sense of community ownership. Students constructed a model of the envisioned plaza, inspired by public plazas found throughout Mexico, intending to evoke a sense of familiarity for students and families.

Promote Respect and Understanding



Y-PLAN students understand that no one is immune from housing instability and emphasize the importance of respecting the unhoused when providing:

- **Technical Support:**
 - *Extending Library Hours*
 - *Laptop Rentals*
 - *College Counselors*
- **Social Support**
 - *School Day Recreational Activities*
 - *Peer Mentorship*

Y-PLAN is critical in both planning and education discourses because it allows young people to sharpen and share their expertise. At the core of Y-PLAN and its innovative community of practice model is a foundation of mutual respect between students, clients and educators. It is not surprising that throughout the process, students also identified mutual respect and understanding as critical to the health and prosperity of a community.

At the High School for Enterprise, Business and Technology (EBT) in Brooklyn, students worked with the New York City Department of Homeless Services to improve college and career readiness for students in temporary housing, such as shelters and group homes. Students conducted surveys and interviews and learned that much of what students in temporary housing needed was **Support and Acknowledgement of their Obstacles and Successes**. In addition to technical and educational support such as **laptops that can be checked out** at schools and shelters, recommendations also included **peer mentorship** programs, **school day recreational activities** to facilitate social inclusion, and a citywide **graduation ceremony**. Above all, their goal was to show students that their community supports and encourages them as they move forward on their educational journey. EBT Students did not stop at the proposal stage, but raised funds to donate laptops to local shelters and helped them to set up a distribution program. They also implemented a food pantry at their Grand Street Campus to support students who are food insecure, a challenge often faced by students in temporary housing. When given the space to investigate an issue and respect for their conclusions, these students were able to expand access to technology for students living in temporary housing, which they found to be a key obstacle to student success.

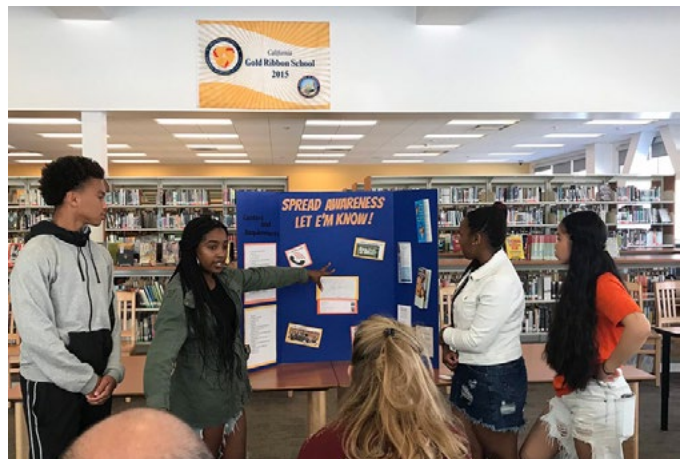
Across the country, students at De Anza High School Health Academy in Richmond, CA suggested a variation on the tiny home solution to homelessness. In their proposal, residents experiencing homelessness would be taught to construct their own homes, fusing housing with **skill building** while fostering a sense of **pride**. Many other Y-PLAN student scholar groups advocated for **Community Programming** – for specialized groups like young people and seniors, and for everyone – because **they do not see homes as merely the physical structures but instead as the cornerstones of the communities and cultures in which they live**.

CONCLUSION

The findings of these Y-PLAN project profiles reveal that students are able to grasp the debates occurring in planning today on cross-sector topics like the housing crisis and master the subject matter of the field. Further, students enrich planning conversations by bringing their invaluable lived experience as young community members.

Students know what is happening on the ground and identify the same core causes as the experts in discussions about California's housing crisis, namely the lack of **Housing Affordability and Supply** and **Support for Unhoused People**, and the need for **Innovation in Housing Policy and Form** and increased **Stability and Tenant Protections**. They speak in support of popular interventions when they see them as efficacious, such as revising zoning codes to expedite the production of ADUs and new and increased funding streams for affordable housing; push policies like rent control to include consideration of further implications; and suggest new ideas when they see a gap in the planning discourse.

As seen through their recommendations for addressing the housing crisis in California and beyond, **Y-PLAN teaches students the professional expertise they need to undertake planning work while valuing the knowledge inherent in their lived experience.**



The housing crisis in California is acute and will need radical interventions to solve it. In service of that goal, Y-PLAN student scholars push us all to consider ourselves as part of one community, working together toward our collective well-being and valuing the insights of all of our members. In the wise words of students from a fourth grade Y-PLAN class in Santa Rosa, CA:

"Share your space!"

Written by Deborah McKoy, Amanda Eppley, and Elena Eimert

Formatted by Katie Marr

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