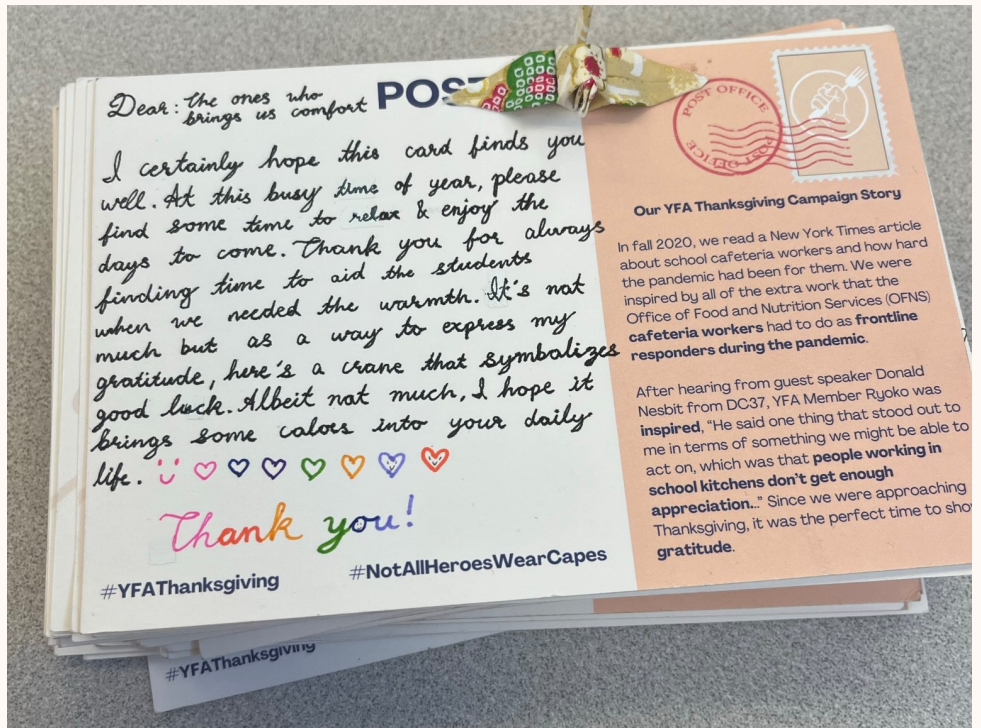




# School Food & Giving Back

YOUTH FOOD ADVOCATES NEWSLETTER



Cover Photo: Aliyah Maliq (left); Postcards collected for YFA Thanksgiving Campaign (right).

## A Why and a Way of Giving Back

By Aliyah Maliq

As a little girl growing up in Nigeria, I have seen communities struggle with food insecurity. I always wanted to help people but I didn't know how. When I came to the United States at the age of 13, I found that there are different ways to help people and give back to my community. I give back to my community so that I can make a difference in this world. It was important for me to learn about injustices in my community and that is why I joined Youth Food Advocates. Something I value the most is communication. While it was scary at first, I want to be a voice for those who don't believe or who want to give up. I want to show others that there is a way to speak up and keep moving forward.

As a YFA member I represent my school on matters that a lot of people don't really pay attention to; the school food in our cafeteria. Before joining YFA I wanted the food in the cafeteria to be improved and after joining YFA, I found out that it can take a while to change or improve things on the food menu. This year we are focusing on making school food more accessible to all NYC students. I have been helping people and as I move forward I will continue to help people to promote equity and justice in our schools.

**A Why and a Way continues of page 3**

### In This Issue:

- A Why and a Way of Giving Back - Pages 1 & 3
- YFA Actions - Page 2
- YFA Updates - Page 3
- Advocate Spotlight - Page 4
- Contact Us- Page 4

### Who We Are

Youth Food Advocates are **food justice leaders** and **school food experts** from across multiple NYC public high schools. Our goal is to ensure all 1.1 million NYC public school students have **access to the best, most nutritious** school food. We know how important it is for students like us to have food that **fuels us** and **helps us succeed** in school. We represent NYC high school campuses **across the city** and **gather weekly to advocate** on behalf of all students.

# Giving Back with YFA Actions

By Yasmine Bonilla

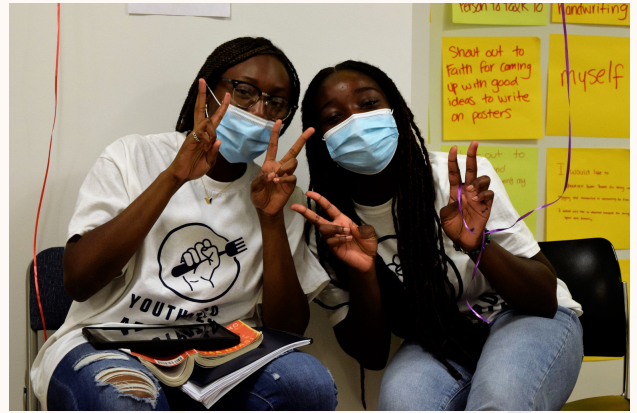
Want to be a part of change to school food? Here are some ways you can GIVE BACK and help YFA advocate for better school food.

## 1

### Reach Out to Student Leaders.

YFA is happy to announce that we have received indispensable support from Mayor Adams and Chancellor David Banks for cafeteria redesign ([click here to see more](#)). Tell your local youth leaders about YFA and ask them to sign our sign-on letter to share their support for the funding for enhanced cafeterias.

Reach out to your school's student leadership (student leadership, student council, etc.) to help amplify the voices of like-minded youth and youth organizations that are working towards food justice and equity. We want policymakers to see the number of schools interested in our efforts and giving their support so that they continue to champion for change.



Tiffany (left) and Nadia (right) at YFA training

## 2

### Share Your Experience.

Share your thoughts on where school food is lacking and how it can be improved. Your feedback will help us better understand the experiences and opinions of NYC public school students and amplify your voices to create policy change.

Over the years, YFA has created surveys to get your feedback:

- With our **YFA Menu Inclusivity Survey** you can share your opinion on the inclusivity of your school food based on how the food caters to dietary needs and embraces cultural diversity.
- Take our **YFA Menu Survey** if you want to suggest specific fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and drinks you want to see in your school cafeteria and to provide feedback on popular hot and cold items already on the OFNS menu.
- With our **YFA School Food Report Card**, you can grade how welcoming the environment is, the school food menu, and the cafeteria communication with students at your school.

## 3

### Request an OFNS Food Taste Test for Your School.

Talk to your principal and propose a field trip to the Office of Food and Nutrition Services headquarters in Long Island City, Queens. With your principal's support, get in contact with the OFNS to request this free opportunity for you and your peers. You can provide feedback on new menu ideas before they are implemented into our school menus.



OFNS Taste Test at Stuyvesant High School (left) organized by Ashley (left) and Shivani (right)

## YFA Fall & Winter Highlights

By Safowana Islam

After summer training and taking some time in September to acclimate to the new school year, we started our weekly (virtual) planning meetings and got to work, here are some highlights!

### 3rd Annual YFA Thanksgiving Campaign 2022

Each of us collected cards of gratitude in our high schools for our cafeteria workers. We understand how hard our cafeteria workers work and we want to show our gratitude. We collected and gifted over **1,000 postcards!** Our YFA members who collected the most postcards:

- **Regina M.**, Edward R. Murrow HS, Brooklyn (426 postcards)
- **Yasmine B.**, Francis Lewis HS, Queens (99 postcards)
- **Nadia N.**, Tottenville HS, Staten Island (90 postcards)

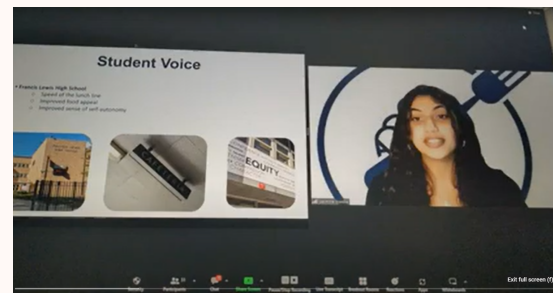
Thank you to **ALL OF YOU** who participated and joined us in sharing our gratitude!

[View Photo Album](#)

### Speaking to our Communities & City Council

We have been in contact with school communities and the City Council to discuss exciting plans for improvements and advancements made to cafeterias throughout New York City.

Yasmine from Francis Lewis HS presented at a Queens High School Presidents' Council meeting in December to shed light on her experience with improved wait time, food appeal, and autonomy felt by students with the enhanced serving lines recently installed at FLHS.



Yasmine speaking at QHSPC meeting

## A Why and a Way

Continued from Page 1

In YFA, we do a lot of planning and thinking together. When asked why it is so important for young people to give back, here's what other YFAers shared:

*"We have to take into account that there were generations before us who have given us benefits and that we should continue to advocate for change so that we in turn give back to the generations after us."* -Simrin, a freshman at Brooklyn Tech High School

*"I think it is important to give back to my community as my community is what helped raise me and shape me into the person that I am today."* -Joshua, is a junior at Flushing High School.

*"We can make our imprint on our community by giving back to create more inclusive, equitable systems that everyone can enjoy."* -Yasmine is a senior at Francis Lewis High School.

We are all here because we want to make our community better. We saw a problem and we know we need to be active participants in finding solutions so we are each working on projects to make school food more accessible in each of our communities. We dedicate our time to becoming school food experts so that we can be a resource to other students who want to make changes.

As the world evolves and changes everyday we need to find ways to make things better for our communities. If you are a young person in NYC, find your "why" and then find a way to give back. And remember, we are the leaders of tomorrow.

## Youth Advocate Spotlight

By Faith Catherine Jones and Tiffany Sadiq

**Ang Lama(she/her/hers)-** Ang is a 21 yrs old student majoring in Dietetics, Food, and Nutrition at Lehman College. She was a CUNY Food Justice Leadership Fellow and joined YFA in August as a guest speaker for our Young People in Power Panel.

**How would you describe the food options at Lehman College and how does that compare with your high school experience?** *Affordability is a huge issue, especially because when you're in college, you have to pay for those meals. When you're in high school, there are certain programs that are placed for you to sign up to get free or reduced lunch. You don't have that option when you go to college. Everything that you need or require, you have to pay for out of your own pocket. So I think that's something that's very challenging for certain students.*

**What is the importance of school food and nutrition in food justice?** *When I did my internship with EdibleSchoolyard NYC, I remember this one experience specifically where we were out in the garden... The relationship that certain people have with food, depending on how they grew up, is so different. ....So it was just a very shocking experience for me. And it kind of just made me realize, depending on what you had available to you, how that can affect your relationship with the food.*

**How would you define a community, and how do you think that plays a role in the way in which you give back to it?**

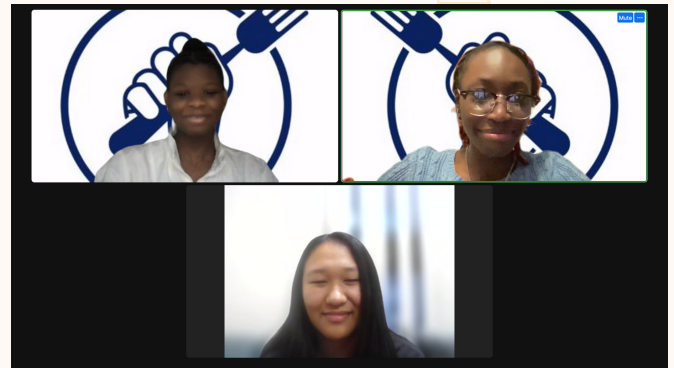
*A community is a group of individuals with common interests that come together... it's basically a group of individuals that have common interests that come together and help each other through sharing resources, through sharing knowledge, and basically building each other up. ...I think the way you give back to... educate yourself, be aware of resources. Even if you don't need those resources, it's always important to be aware and then to share all the knowledge that you've gained.*

**What would be your advice for aspiring youth activists that want to start to speak up about food justice, and inequality?**

*The most important thing is to try to be humble. Because when you're in spaces where everyone's trying to learn... every time I'm facilitating something...The mindset that I go into it is I have certain knowledge, but the people that are going to come and ask students to gain knowledge from me are all going to have different perspectives. They're going to have different things that they can bring to the table. So I think the most important thing is to have an open dialogue, be open to sharing, and also receive knowledge from other people, because you won't know everything no matter how many years of experience and knowledge that you think you have, there's always something that you can learn.*

Ang shared so much more!

Follow us on social media to watch the interview.



Ang (bottom) speaking with Faith (top left) and Tiffany (top right)

## Giving Back in Our Communities

By Faith Catherine Jones

If you want to give back outside of school, here are some additional ideas!

**Giving Back Food** - City Harvest is one non-profit that accepts donations such as canned food and non-perishables. Check your cabinets and ask parents at home if you can donate to [City Harvest](#).

**Giving Back Time** - A soup kitchen might be the only available meal for some families, so soup kitchens get busy very quickly. You can volunteer to help serve meals and support your community's soup kitchen's efforts.

**Giving Back Locally** - If you're looking for an afterschool or summer job, consider working at local restaurants and supermarkets. When residents work at community establishments, they help maintain businesses, prevent food insecurity, and learn to appreciate the hard work that happens at every step of the food supply chain that keeps our city's food systems moving!

## Contact Us



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