

Young Visionaries for Health

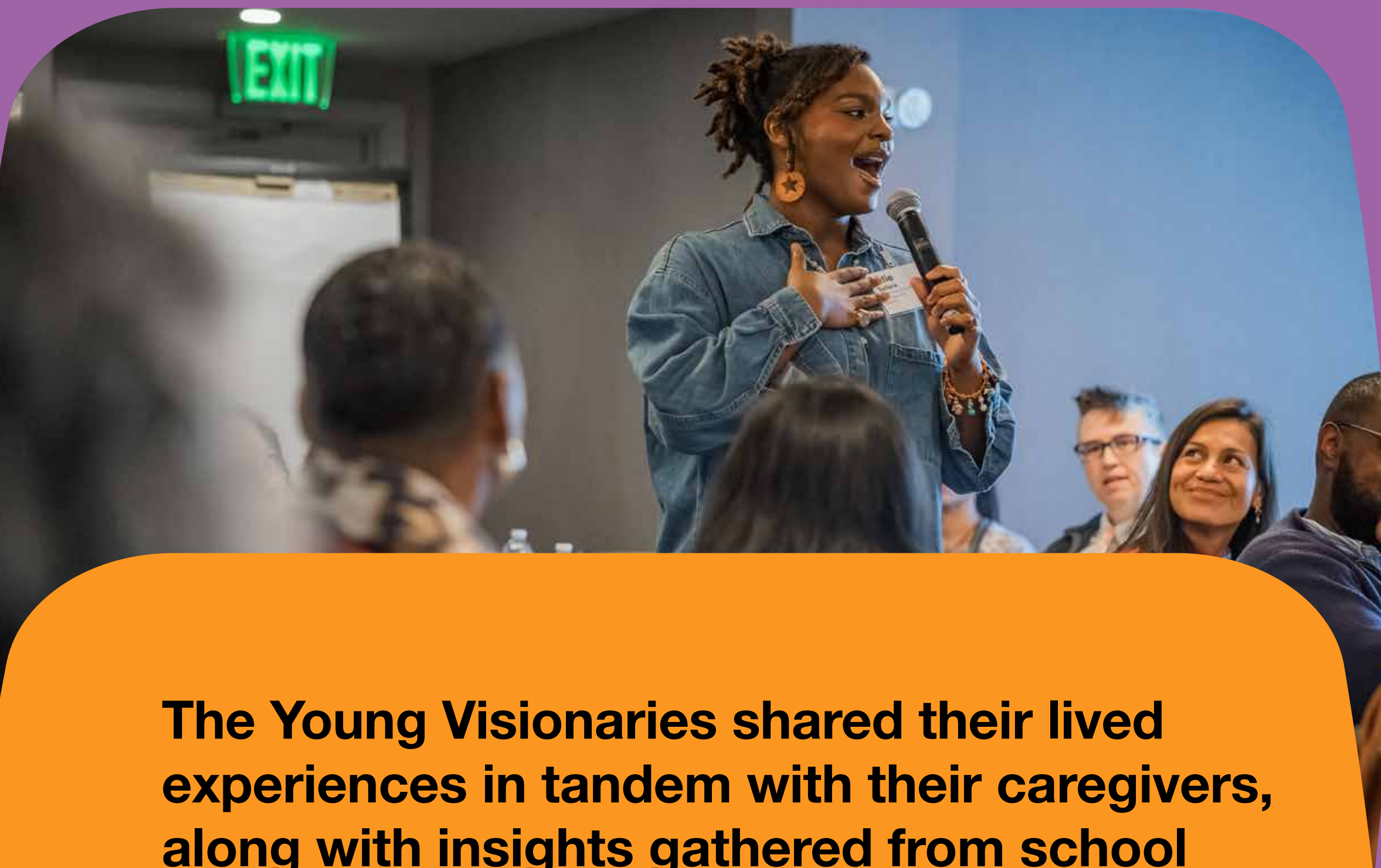
Building Cultures
that Heal and Thrive



Community Leading the Way

The University of North Carolina partnered with Community Enrichment Organization to improve community wellbeing in Tarboro, North Carolina through a youth-led research project.

The research team worked on this project with a group of 12 high school students known as the Young Visionaries for Health, who are focused on building a culture of safety and belonging at Tarboro High School.



The Young Visionaries shared their lived experiences in tandem with their caregivers, along with insights gathered from school administrators and community leaders.

Initially, the project focused on promoting physical activity among youth. However, **it became evident that the core issues were related to emotional wellbeing,** especially considering the social impacts of the Covid pandemic.

In alignment with community needs, the research collaborative shifted their focus to mental health.



What Did This Research Reveal?

The research collaborative explored how youth conceptualize mental health, what kinds of mental health services exist in the community, and what Black youth perceive as their unique needs for flourishing.

Young people expressed the effects of limited self-awareness and emotional intelligence on stress-management skills, with a strong **desire for support resources that are informed by other youth** experiencing similar problems.

They exposed **resistance to the conversation of mental health due to stigma** informed by social misconceptions of mental illness, and cultural views on strength as a significant barrier to accessing mental health support.



Why Do These Findings Matter?



Rates of death by suicide among Black youth, especially males, are rising. The findings reveal the **significance of maternal-caregiver relationships in youth mental health** and the numerous obstacles both youth and caregivers face in the search for culturally sensitive mental health care.

The power of culture should not be underestimated, given deeply entrenched beliefs around strength, resilience, and transparency unique to African American communities.





How the Research is Shaping the Future

The project is fostering a sense of agency among community youth, encouraging them to leverage that agency to make better decisions for their future, and supporting them to live in alignment with their purpose.

The Young Visionaries have identified an evidence-based, **mind-body intervention** to **promote self-care and cultivate mental health.**

Throughout the 2025-2026 programming year, the Young Visionaries developed a prototype for the intervention focused on youth-led conflict mediation entitled: Leadership Mentors.

They currently have a total of seven graduates from the program and a successful transition in power for the 2026-2027 school year.

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"To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality."

— bell hooks



Learn More

AcademyHealth supports community-led researchers producing evidence for community-driven solutions. Learn more about all Community Research for Health Equity grantees at:

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