

# Journeys

Celebrating the Stories  
of NYC Youth **2019**

A BENEFIT HOSTED BY FRESH YOUTH INITIATIVES



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# Journeys

Celebrating the Stories of NYC Youth



*a benefit hosted by  
Fresh Youth Initiatives*



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New York, NY

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# Event Program

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## When:

**Thursday, May 2, 2019**  
**6:00 pm – 9:00 pm**

## Where:

**Manhattan Penthouse**  
80 Fifth Avenue, 17th floor  
New York, NY 10011

## Music By:

**DJ Carver the Great**

## Emcee:

**Mino Lora**  
People's Theatre Project

## Festivities:

Cocktail reception in the anteroom  
Buffet and drinks in the main event space  
FYI Samba Band performance  
FYI Journeys: youth story presentation  
Remarks from Board Chair Rebecca Sale  
... Plus a fantastic silent auction!

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\* Event Chair  
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## About FYI

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Fresh Youth Initiatives empowers youth who have the fewest resources to achieve their greatest potential. Our programs address five challenges in our community:

- The academic achievement gap among Latino youth
- Immigration — adjusting to a new home and language
- School transitions, especially middle to high school to college
- Social-emotional and mental health needs
- Access to resources that prepare youth for college and careers



The kids we serve don't lack talent or ambition, but they will and do benefit from a boost. Tutoring, reading instruction, STEM activities, guidance and counseling make a difference. Opportunities like summer jobs and college visits can be life-changing. Children who face serious trauma receive expert support and kindness. And our afterschool, weekend, and summer camp programs provide a safe enriched place for kids while parents juggle the competing demands of jobs (often several) and raising a family.

FYI thanks you, our supporters, and all the people who work side-by-side with us. Together we are helping 1,400 children from 4-19 years of age to reach their very best potential. Together, we are making the world a better place for children and teens.

**Dear Friends and Supporters of FYI,**

When we asked some of our graduating seniors to reflect back on their experiences at Fresh Youth Initiatives, they settled on matters of the heart.

To all of you, who are troubled by fractures in American society, we remind you of this... communities can be kind, soothe wounds, advance good works, and nurture the very best in each of us. As you will read, some writers grew up at FYI. Others arrived in due time. Their message, however, is the same. At an important time in their lives, Fresh Youth Initiatives offered a refuge — a place to learn, grow, and connect with others.

**We invite you — newcomers and old friends — to celebrate your connection to this very special community.**



Eileen Lyons

## Keily

FYI es familia porque cada momento que paso junto a FYI son momento muy felices. De igual manera, en FYI he obtenido amistades muy valiosas en mi vida y cada dia que pasamos juntos se convierten cada vez mas en parte de mi familia.

## Yarianny

FYI has given me a lot. It's where I met Ms. Beatriz and she's incredible. She was the first person I trusted at FYI. I enjoy my journey of life by being a part of FYI's clubs and going on all the trips.

## Amayelin

A turning point in my life was when I went to my first therapy session. FYI supported me when I needed it the most.



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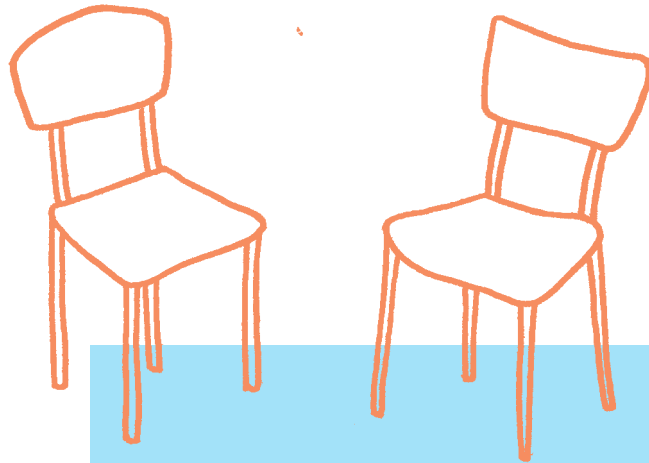
## Alondra

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I have meetings with Susan where we talk about how I feel. I started looking back into my childhood. I started remembering my difficult situation with my father. He would hit me as a kind of punishment and then he ended up not being there. I faced a lot of bullying at school. I was trying to get everyone to like me, but I would get anxiety. Knowing all this, I wanted to get to college feeling new, without remorse and negativity. I wanted to do this for my emotional health.

Susan and I talk about all this, and she listens to me, and that's the most important thing. To have an adult who listens to you. And doesn't judge you. She always supports and listens to me. We tried to work it out so I could feel better. It's not ignored, or it's not absurd, and it's not forgotten; she just listens to me.

She is like a guardian angel rescuing me from my dark inner demons. I told her one of the reasons I am stronger now is because of her. She is one of the reasons I haven't given up. With college, and problems at home, sometimes you just want to give up. But I never did. It's amazing how they protect us like we're their own children.



## Edilenni

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Being a participant of FYI has helped build the way I think and the way I am as person. A lot of the staff in FYI have seen a change in my attitude compared to what it used to be. About 3 years ago I used to be a difficult person to deal with. I was always walking around with my guard up, I had trouble trusting people, which affected a lot of my personal and social life. It affected the way I acted in the organization that I love so much. I started being rude to many staff just because I thought they were coming at me, when in reality they were just trying to build a connection with me and get to know me. The wall I had built up caused many people to look at me different. Now I have made a couple of dents in the wall I have built. I've learned to accept my insecurities. I've allowed myself to open up more and I've tried to trust more people. FYI played a big role in my change. FYI staff had patience with me and encouraged me to change. They made me realize that at times although it might be hard, you need to try to have a positive attitude towards people and the things you do. They made me realize I wasn't affecting anyone but myself and I thank FYI for that.

## Alberto

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When it comes to FYI, I can relate to the phrase "expect the unexpected" because of everything that has happened to me, I did not expect at all. To start off, I became a youth leader in about my first 5 months. If we're being real, I think I set a world record! I did not expect that I would have one of the best summers of my life during 2017 and 2018 with FYI's summer camp. It was just amazing and enjoyable working alongside staff, other counselors that I've never met before, and with current and incoming middle school students. Lastly, I'm not a crier, but when I tell you that Wendy held one of the most genuine, powerful, and sentimental activities ever, she did. It made you feel so good as a person that I bawled my eyes out over people who I knew for no more than half a year. With that in mind, "quality over quantity."





# Jesus

---

Before I came to the United States, I was an isolated person. In DR, I didn't have many friends; they bullied me and rejected me. Without knowing it, I did actions that were perceived as feminine.

When I got to Luperón High School, I auditioned for the Fashion Show. During auditions, another student said an offensive comment to me and it made me remember how people used to treat me in DR. I went and told Paola that I did not want to be part of the Fashion Show. But she said there will always be someone who judges you, but it shouldn't stop you from doing what you like or want. At this point I started crying because I was opening my feelings to her. She gave me support and listened to me and encouraged me to talk to Susan. I talked to Susan about my experiences, and I learned how to express myself and not be afraid of who I am. I began to love myself and accept who I am. And it helped me be more of who I am.

I modeled in the Fashion Show. And everyone went crazy!

At the end, I was thankful to Susan and Paola because they gave me the support that I needed to challenge myself to do what I like without thinking about what others would say.



## Bryant

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I used to be very lost. Don't get me wrong, I physically knew where I was, but I really did not know where my mind was at all. I left everything behind—my house, my things, my family, my friends—to come to New York to receive a better education and better opportunities for my future. But I was not ready for this change. I found myself in a school that was huge and full of people who spoke the same but were totally different. Many days passed in which my heart had no direction and my mind did not stop comparing all the experiences of my home country to my new life in the United States. I knew where I was geographically, but in school and social settings, I was stuck in a cave, looking out and writing everything down and analyzing the new things I saw.

In a blink I was surrounded by people like me—people who were lost in this world and were as interested as I was in learning how things worked. Later I was in the hallway and I remembered the moment I received it in my hands. I had just joined FYI's school newspaper club. A lot of time passed, and I felt integrated into society. Finally I had found a place where I could express my opinions, a place where I could discuss themes, a place where I could laugh with the people who were there.



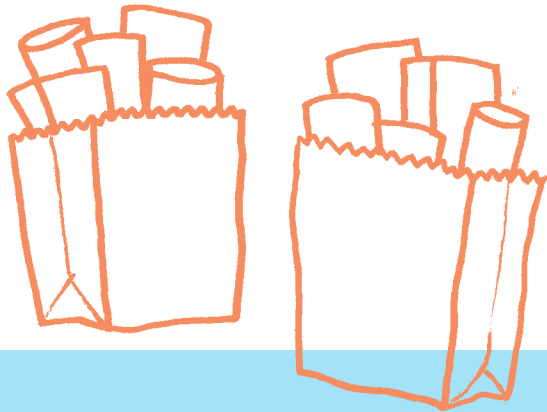
## Rashell

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When I came to this country I did not know a word of English. I was only eleven years old and it was so hard to learn English. Then I found FYI and everything got better. FYI is a family to me because every single person there treats me like a family. I have so much love for all the kids and the staff, and that love is not going anywhere no matter what happens in my future.

We do everything together. My family loves FYI because of the way they treat us and because of the way they treat the community. In the summer of 2017, my partner Percy and I started a food drive where we cleaned out a pantry and separated the canned goods and put them into bags. We gave canned goods and a turkey to members of the community and their reaction brought us joy. They gave us their blessings and it was such a beautiful moment. Everyone was so thankful for it. That was something I'll always remember.

My favorite thing about FYI is when we go to Camp Scatico. We go in August for six days and do so many cool things there. It feels amazing because we get to spend more time together and the games we play are so cool. The staff help us in so many ways whether it's school problems or problems at home. FYI holds a place in my heart and it is a place I can call home.



## Rey

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Eight years of my time at Fresh Youth Initiatives, an after school program that is about helping the community of Washington Heights, turned into something much more for me. The beginning: at age 10, the staff's presentation about FYI at my school captured the imaginations of me and a majority of the 5th grade population. We decided to sign up and see what all this fuss was about; we ended up loving this place. So many bonds, memories, tears, and work done over the past 8 years at FYI have taught me about the qualities of a good leader, the hardships of what others go through in the world, and the thrill of the smaller moments of life. I've been a Youth Leader at FYI for 5 years and in this position I have been in charge of countless groups with different types of personalities. I had to learn to lead, even though in the beginning I had doubts. I was an introvert, but learning how to communicate and lead different types of personalities built my confidence as well as my ability to work collaboratively with others, and at the same time, to lead by example. I have used what I learned outside of FYI.

## Angel

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FYI gives me a space where I can be free and let my emotions flow. FYI offers me mental peace. I was going through a hard situation in my house and I didn't have the energy to laugh. But while being in FYI, I forget about all my pressures and pain. FYI gave me my smile back. In other words, FYI put a smile on a person who needs it the most. The trips let me discover new places. The meetings let me express how I am feeling and make me think that there are people here for me. They become my family—my unique family. There are no words to describe how much FYI helps me to become who I am. All my successes and wins in a new country, I dedicate it to the FYI family.

## Yara

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I never had a mother figure. When I was younger, I didn't live with my mom and when I moved out of DR, I was alone with my dad. Since I moved so much from place to place, I didn't have that person to tell my things to. When I came to FYI, I found that I can talk to people like Wendy about anything happening in my life. I never got to do this before. I wouldn't talk to anyone; I was very shy. I'm a closed person overall, but I was worse when I was smaller.

But at FYI, I have people to talk to if I ever need to let something out. I feel so welcomed when I come here. I really love FYI. I'm always at home, or school, or FYI. Some of my closest friends are from here. Overall I am a better person. I'm more loving and I am grateful for everything FYI has done for me. One day I hope I can help someone who was in my shoes.



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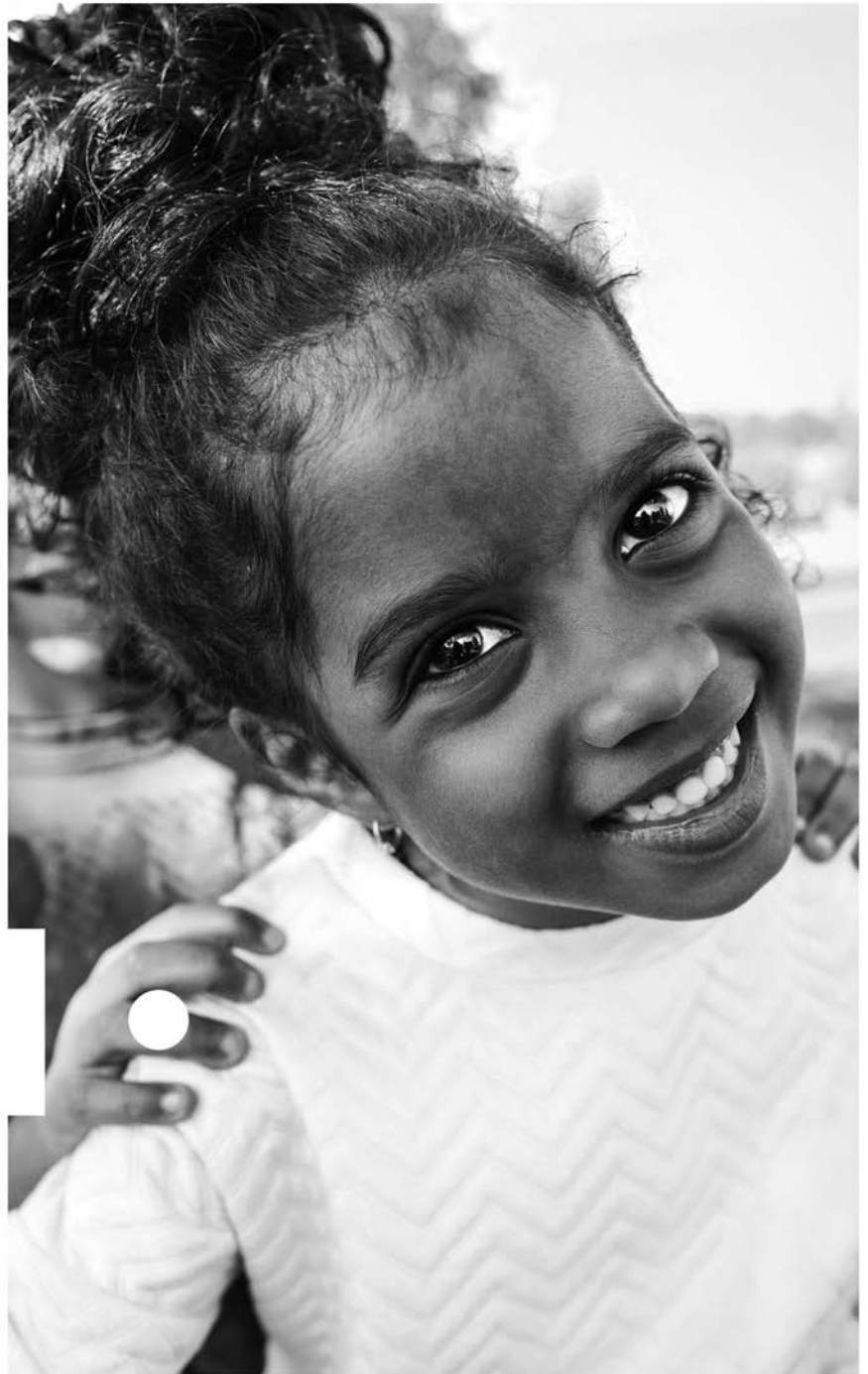
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**FYI staff members** for their  
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Fresh Youth Initiatives is celebrating its twenty-sixth year of helping children and teens who have the fewest resources to reach their greatest potential.

With your help, FYI empowers immigrant and first generation youth to navigate life's most challenging transitions.

