



YEP set aside \$50,000 from the IMPACT 100 grant for the new van, to cover the cost of purchasing the vehicle, insurance and decal. The van will be used for all of YEP's programs, which together serve more than 1,000 youth and their families in and around Central City each year.

## A New Set of Wheels

From the summer camp to The Village, YEP's programs aim to get people out in the community as much as possible. Until now, this has often meant that staff—often several at once—had to use their own vehicles to transport program participants around the city and keep track of their mileage for reimbursement. Alternately, program staff would have to rent vehicles, which is costly.

But now, thanks to the IMPACT 100, YEP has been able to purchase a brand new, 15-passenger van, with which they can easily transport youth to activities throughout the community.

"The youth center participants and staff members are excited about having access to transportation for group activities," said Sonja Brown, YEP's afterschool and summer program coordinator. "We can expand our mentoring activities and increase the number and quality of fun activities provided to kids in the program."

"The Village and NOPLAY Summer Scholars programs take every opportunity to expose students to service opportunities, cultural enrichment activities and options for college and careers," said Jessica Irving, program director for The Village. "There's no substitute for getting out into the world and experiencing it all firsthand. Our new van will allow us to take advantage of all our city has to offer!"

"It's going to be really wonderful to not have to worry about renting a van for field trips for our various programs," said Glenis Scott, director of case management. "The van will allow us to conduct more community and educational field trips! Having a van will also mean we're no longer reliant on staff's own personal vehicles."





Natasha Smith and her daughter Leshae are counting the days until YEP's summer camp re-opens. Last year, 76 students were enrolled and this year approximately 100 will attend thanks to the Impact 100 grant.

## Fun in the Sun: The YEP Summer Camp

It may be barely spring now, but 11-year-old Leshae is already looking forward to summer camp. This will be her third year at the summer camp run by the Youth Empowerment Project at their Youth Center on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard.

"I love the summer camp," Leshae says. "We go swimming, do art, computers, music." Her favorite part is recreation, such as dodge ball and four square. Laughing, she tells a story about Mr. Darren hiding the dodge ball behind his back and saying he's not out after he's been hit.

"I love it," said Natasha, Leshae's mother. "It keeps them out of trouble, keeps them focused, and gives them something positive to do. If it's raining or if it's snowing, they want to come. If it was open 24/7, they would come all day."

Leshae's nine-year-old brother, Lavar, also attends the summer camp, where he loves to play basketball. Leshae's friends from school are excited to start attending the summer camp after hearing her talk about it so much.

Natasha appreciates how the program offers many opportunities for parents and grandparents to be involved as well. "Her grandmother is always here for everything. She doesn't miss a beat!"

"The staff are very friendly. They love their kids, and these are their kids."

YEP has been running the summer camp for five years. Art classes are taught by muralist Lionel Milton, and swimming lessons take place at the NORD pool at Audubon Park. The kids, ranging in age from 7 to 13, go on field trips around the city and are taught topics such as self-esteem, anger management, and digital literacy. Most of the children live in Central City and also attend YEP's after school program, so they have a continuous year-round experience. Hot breakfast and lunch are served at camp, and the program is completely free. With few such programs being offered in the city, YEP's summer camp is in high demand—it fills up fast.

**The summer camp will receive \$25,000 from the IMPACT 100 grant. Last year the program served 76 children; this year, due in part to this grant, it will serve approximately 100.**





Ebony (left) is studying to take the high school equivalency exam with instructor Rogdericka Ellis who graduated from YEP's program in 2012 and now instructs students like Ebony. YEP will allocate \$25,000 from the IMPACT 100 grant to support the comprehensive services and enrichment services that the Village provides.

## Hope and Preparation for the Future: The Village

After nine years in Texas where she had been displaced since Hurricane Katrina and living with an adoptive mother who beat her and made her ask permission to eat, 17-year-old Ebony was finally old enough to make it back to New Orleans on her own. But that didn't mean it would be easy.

Ebony's birth mother, with whom she had longed to reconnect, is HIV-positive, has a history of drug addiction, and was unable to care for her. So Ebony stayed at Covenant House. There, she heard about the Youth Empowerment Project's NOPLAY program (New Orleans Providing Literacy to All Youth).

NOPLAY provides free education to out-of-school youth ages 16-24 to prepare them to take the high school equivalency exam. The program also pays for the students' testing fees and offers transitional counseling to help them get into and succeed at college or employment. YEP has hired 10 of its own graduates to work in the NOPLAY program.

The Village, a more intensive subset of NOPLAY, offers more comprehensive wraparound services to meet the varied needs of the city's most vulnerable out-of-school youth, such as Ebony.

When Ebony's adoptive mother wouldn't send her birth certificate or Social Security card, a Village staff member helped her obtain the documents and pay for them. When she lost her ID, they took her get another one. The Village helped her polish her

résumé, leading to a job at Liberty's Kitchen. They even helped her out one time when she lost \$50.

"Whatever you need help on, they'll help you," Ebony said. "They push me so hard; they never give up on me. Whenever I say I can't do something, they tell me I can. I can talk to them about anything without being judged. They could be my mother or my sister. NOPLAY is just a big family."

Now 18, Ebony lives with her aunt, works at McDonald's, and attends classes at The Village Monday through Friday mornings. She receives group instruction in math, reading, and language, as well as in additional subjects such as drug awareness and financial literacy. Extra one-on-one instruction allows the students, who are at different levels, to move at their own pace.

Ebony lights up when asked about her hopes and dreams for the future. "I want to go to college, and I want to be a nurse. I know I can do it. I'm really smart."

"I've been put down a lot in my life," said Ebony. "But the past is the past. You've just got to make the future better."

