



# Manchester Youth Commission

*Annual Report*

September 2023- June 2024

## INTRODUCTION

The Manchester Youth Commission (MYC) welcomed 19 new members for the 2023-2024 year on September 15th, 2023. We started our year with 23 members, four of whom were returning. As a commission, we recruited 22 new applicants. Seven seniors are graduating this year, and there are five open seats, leaving space for 12 applicants to be accepted for the 2024-2025 term. We are reaching the end of our recruitment process and are excited to welcome a new group in the fall. Together, we've experienced many successes and moments of celebration and complex challenges that have taught us invaluable lessons. Beyond the hardships we've faced this year, the commission communicated well and efficiently overcame difficulties, leading to an unforgettable and exceptional year.

- Feeha Amir, Vice Chair

## *MISSION STATEMENT*

“The Manchester Youth Commission is a diverse group of youth collaborating with the local government to create open communication in the decision-making process, making it possible to strengthen the community through the voice of youth.”

## *TAG LINE*

The Manchester Youth Commission:

EMPOWERING THE VOICE OF YOUTH IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



## SUCSESSES

We are excited and grateful to share the following successes and achievements from this past year:

1. **Special Orders:** One of the commission's responsibilities is to be open to town departments and guests seeking youth perspectives on projects and issues impacting the community. The following attended meetings throughout the year:
  - a. The town of Manchester's Recreation Department:
    - i. Josh Charette, Recreation Supervisor, came to the commission seeking assistance for the annual Fall Fest.
  - b. Public Hearing for Potential Grant Recipients:
    - i. The commission invited four grant applicants to expand on their program or project to help drive funding decisions. Representatives from Manchester High School's (MHS) Science Research Class, the Tri-M Music Honor Society, and PowerUp-EmpowerU attended.
  - c. Manchester's Office of Communications and Civic Engagement sought input on the town's Branding and Marketing project.
  - d. Awet Tsegai from the town of East Hartford was interested in the commission and its processes, as they are interested in starting a similar commission.
  - e. The town of Manchester's Planning and Economic Development Department was seeking input for the Downtown Improvement Project.
2. **The Annual Retreat:** During the annual retreat, we encouraged commission bonding and discussed the grant funding process.
  - a. Grants:
    - i. Each commissioner read and scored fourteen grant applications.



- ii. We began deliberating by discussing our scores and which grants we believed should be funded.

b. Commission Bonding

- i. During the Adventure Race at the annual retreat, commissioners worked together in their committees to complete team challenges.
- ii. Commissioners participated in gift-making and made a gift for a randomly chosen commissioner, allowing them to create new relationships with one another.
- iii. Many other short-term activities, like the trash bag fashion show and cafeteria breaks, allowed the commissioners to converse with each other and get to know one another on a deeper level.

3. **MLK Celebration:** The MYC hosted the 39th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration on January 30th, 2024.

- a. The celebration commemorated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and community members, Manchester Public Schools representatives, members of the Board of Directors and the Board of Education, and students celebrated his racial equality and justice legacy.

b. Performances

- i. Talented people and groups performed during the ceremony, including Mr. Ryan Parker, who performed a spoken word piece, the Illing Jazz Ensemble, the Illing Middle School Step Team, and the Bennet Singers.



- c. Speeches
  - i. Mayor Jay Moran, keynote speaker Janzé Richardson, and Board of Education member Kwasi Ntem-Mensah gave speeches.
- d. Awards
  - i. The commissioners presented awards to student leaders from various schools who exemplified Martin Luther King, Jr.'s social justice, diversity, and equity mission.
  - ii. Commissioners wrote speeches to honor the award recipients and introduce them and their schools to the audience. This year, the commissioners focused on sharing what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy means to them.
- 4. **Doggie Kerplunk:** The MYC worked with the town of Manchester's Recreation Department to host the Doggie Kerplunk Event at Globe Hollow Reservoir.
  - a. Raising money
    - i. The MYC helped raise money for the commission by charging a nominal \$5.00 entrance fee for each dog. We had approximately 75 dogs. We used the money for the annual retreat supplies.
  - b. Commission Introduction
    - i. This event, held before the new term, was a way for recruits and returning commissioners to meet. It was a success because it exemplified the commitment of new commissioners, who attended an event over the summer before the term officially began.



5. **Potluck & Talent Show:** Commissioners met at the Youth Service Bureau and hosted a potluck and a talent show where each got to showcase their food and talents.

a. Sharing Food

i. Commissioners brought various foods to the potluck to share, many from their culture. Everyone enjoyed tasting each other's food while continuing to interact and bond on a deeper level.

b. Talent Show

i. Some commissioners decided to showcase their unique talents. The commissioners enjoyed learning more about one another through the talent show.

### **CHALLENGES**

As a commission, we have prioritized evaluating how we can improve. We have listed some of the obstacles we faced in 2023-2024. Even though we had issues, commissioners adapted well and began to understand the commission much better as the year progressed.

1. **Attendance:** As the year progressed, three members resigned, and the overall participation in commission events decreased.

a. Getting people involved later in the year:

i. Many attended the first few events, such as Fall Fest and the Waffle-Off. However, by the end of the term, events like Rebuilding Together only had a small number of commissioners attending.

b. Member resignations:

i. Three members resigned for personal reasons and the recognition that they could no longer commit to the commission.

c. Scheduling conflicts:



- i. Many of the commissioners are involved in multiple extracurricular activities. Many meeting dates did not align with peoples’ schedules, making attendance challenging. Frequently, commissioners did not communicate these scheduling conflicts until the last minute, making it difficult to reschedule or find a time that worked for everyone.
2. **The Mid-Year Report:** The commission could not create a mid-year report due to unfortunate circumstances.
  - a. Meetings being postponed.
    - i. During the time of the mid-year report, there were snow days, which led to multiple meeting dates being postponed.
    - ii. Due to the large gap between meeting dates and the fact that the commission is primarily made up of new members, we couldn’t do the mid-year report without adequately explaining the process of creating it.
3. **Brand New Commission:** We started the year with 19 new commissioners due to graduating seniors in 2023, creating a nearly brand-new MYC.
  - a. Grant Process
    - i. For new commissioners, this was their first time reading and scoring grants, and fully comprehending the process was a challenge. When scoring grants and understanding the process, people’s scoring systems were completely different.
    - ii. As a commission, we spent more time beyond the retreat working on the grant deliberations. This led to people wanting to fund grants that did not have the highest scores and should have been scored better.



## GRANTS

The MYC is provided \$5,000 to distribute to local organizations or youth-driven projects that benefit the youth of Manchester. The commission received fourteen grant applications, and after careful consideration, seven applicants were funded; four were partially funded, and three were fully funded. This year, the Philanthropy Committee focused on increasing knowledge and understanding of the grant process. Improvements need to be made; however, for a primarily new commission, we were successful and satisfied with our decisions.

### **1. YSB All About Girls - Fully funded: \$1,000**

- a. The Manchester Youth Service Bureau is a local organization that aims to help and enrich the youth in our town. Their proposed project seeks to partner YSB staff with members from Manchester Public Schools to provide a workshop for girls from 4th and 5th grade about menstruation with a trusted adult.

### **2. MHS Student Equity Advisory Team - Fully funded: \$1,000**

- a. MHS Student Equity Advisory Team, or SEAT, is a group of MHS students whose goal is to create a safe environment for all students. They strive to spread awareness of all cultures and current world problems. The money will go towards an event called Multicultural Night, where students can explore foods from other cultures.

### **3. MHS Black Student Union - Fully funded: \$963**

- a. Black Student Union is a club with 84 members that aims to unify all black students by offering diverse events designed to express black culture. They strive to spread awareness of black culture and give black students a voice in the MHS community.



**4. MHS Science Research - Partially funded: \$600**

- a. Manchester Science Research is a MHS class where students pursue their scientific interests. They work independently to design and create their own research. The money from this grant will go towards the budget for the students' experiments.

**5. Change Collaborative - Partially funded: \$537**

- a. The Change Collaborative of Manchester is the town's local substance use prevention council. They host events directed toward the youth that aim to prevent substance abuse. The money granted will be used for snacks and drinks at the end of the annual prevention walk for the youth.

**6. MHS Class Board 2025 - Partially funded: \$500**

- a. The MHS class board of 2025 requested money to fund efforts to engage the student body. They work to engage the students and plan fun events to better their schooling experience. This money will go towards their next event and help fund other events.

**7. Power Up CT's EMPOWERU - Partially funded: \$400**

- a. Power Up CT is working with EMPOWERU to help provide extracurricular activities for the youth in Squire Village. These activities will help enrich their education and provide them with snacks. This program will give them a place to hang out after school and connect with others while bettering their learning and nourishing their bodies while having fun.





## **TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT -COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Throughout the year, the MYC emphasized the importance of leadership and collaboration. We do this through training and development opportunities. These events foster an environment of youth empowerment and allow us to use our voices.

### **1. Bootcamp**

- a. On Saturday, September 9th, the commissioners attended the Annual Boot Camp, where a guest speaker demonstrated the value of teamwork and collaboration.

### **2. Government Academy Program**

- a. During the fall of 2023, the commissioners attended different sessions of Manchester's Government Academy, which was held at various town/government offices and sites. Some examples of the academies were the Fire Department, the Senior Center, the Water Department, and the Police Department.
- b. Every commissioner was required to participate in at least one academy, allowing the understanding of the town's government and its facilities. Learning was shared at subsequent meetings with the entire commission.

### **3. Grant Workshop**

- a. We engaged in a grant workshop; for many commissioners, this was their first experience with grant scoring.

### **4. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Legacy**

- a. The commission spent an entire meeting getting an overview of MLK's work, mission, and legacy to ensure we were clear on the intent of organizing a meaningful celebration in January.



## **5. Retreat**

- a. The MYC retreat was held in December 2023 at Camp Hemlocks, during which commissioners worked to grow closer to one another through community building and teamwork activities.
- b. Along with fun activities, commissioners worked on grant deliberations and scoring during the annual retreat, developing the commissioners' sense of participation and collaboration.
- c. This weekend was filled with fun, group growth, and unification.

## **6. Waffle-Off**

- a. On November 7th, 2023, the Youth Commission held a “Waffle Off” event, in which the three committees competed to make the best waffle.
- b. This fun and engaging competition highlighted exceptional teamwork and good sportsmanship among members. They collaborated closely, supported one another, and celebrated each other's efforts, regardless of the outcome.

## **7. MLK Celebration**

- a. On January 30, 2024, the Youth Commission hosted the 39th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration.
- b. We commemorated Martin Luther King Jr.’s legacy and celebrated black history during this event.
- c. We invited performers from Illing Middle School, Bennet Academy, and the Manchester Poet Laureate.

## **8. PotLuck/ Talent Show**

- a. On March 8th, 2024, the MYC hosted its first potluck/talent show.



- b. Commissioners displayed their talents and, in doing so, strengthened bonds with one another.
- c. The commissioners enjoyed different aspects of each other's cultures, which allowed us to connect over various types of food.

## **9. Boards and Commissions meeting**

- a. Vice Chair Feeha Amir and Co-Advisor Nurun Nahar attended this seminar to review and discuss how board and commission members should consider their participation as a public service and manage their meetings in compliance with Connecticut's Freedom of Information Act.

## **10. Recruitment/Interviews**

- a. In March 2024, commissioners began recruitment for the 2024-2025 term.
- b. On May 21 and May 30, 2024, interviews were conducted with 21 applicants.
- c. In this process, we re-established what being on the MYC entails and the responsibilities.
- d. During the interviews, applicants were asked a series of questions to learn more about the future members of the 2024-2025 commission.
- e. After interviews, the commissioners reviewed and assessed responses to determine who would be the best fit for next year's group. Final decisions will be made in mid-June.

## **GOALS**

### **1. Attendance**

- a. Attendance is one of the most important aspects of growing as a commission, so we aim to focus on its importance to increase overall attendance from the



commissioners. This can be done by scheduling meeting times when most commissioners are available and drawing attention to how vital commissioner attendance is for our group's results and impacts.

## **2. Social Media Use**

- a. We hope to use MYC's Instagram more extensively next year. We hope to utilize the platform to promote events and inform others about our mission. We also wish to use social media platforms to display the MYC's achievements and work throughout the year.

## **3. Autonomy and Agency**

- a. Specifically, during the MLK celebration, we plan to restructure the event to be more commission-led by sending out reminders for deadlines, scheduling and arranging dates for rehearsal, and choosing the performances and speeches for the night.
- b. Overall, we want to grow less reliant on the advisors and become more independently youth-run/confident.

## **4. Increased time management**

- a. Specifically, during the Annual Retreat, we want to establish more straightforward rules for grant scoring and deliberations to ensure accurate results.
  - i. Two essential aspects needed to achieve this goal are scheduling more time to complete the grant scoring and ensuring that everyone is entirely aware of the meaning of each number being used to score and its impacts. With more time to score the grants, commissioners can score with more effort and purpose.



- b. We also hope to use our committees and provide more committee time next year.
  - i. With more time in these groups, the MYC will be able to become more involved within the town through the work of the Community Outreach Committee and Social Events Committee and foster more independence throughout the commission.
  - ii. One example is ensuring that the Community Outreach Committee informs the commission of upcoming events in the town and sets expectations for more involvement from the group.

### **FINAL WORDS**

Closing out our Annual Report has made me realize that without the Manchester Youth Commission, I would not have been able to find myself and my purpose in the world. I discovered my love for public speaking and found my voice as a leader. I spent two years on the commission, and my fellow commission members taught me so much through both years. I have learned the importance of community, I have learned about new cultures and expanded my knowledge on global issues and impacts, I have learned how to grow as a leader so everyone's voice can be heard, and I have truly learned the importance of having youth voice in our government. Youth voice allows for differing opinions but also growth and learning from shared experiences; despite age differences, every one of us has something to learn from each other, and to truly have a successful government, we need to have diversity in our people and our experiences.

As we close out the year, I am proud to have grown and to know everyone on the commission. Everyone holds a special place in my heart, and will continue to do great things in the future. To the commissioners, I deliver my final words: I am so proud of everyone; you have



all grown to be such beautiful people, from our first couple of meetings where the silence was exceptionally loud to now hearing each of you speak and provide your insight. It has indeed been an honor to be your Chair, and If there is anything I hope for you all to take away from your experience on the commission, it's that your voice matters, what you say matters, and you always know your worth.

I want to thank the Town Manager and the Board of Directors for providing a platform for youth empowerment and believing in the value of youth voices and perspectives. We feel heard and honored by your trust in our abilities. We have worked hard to uphold your expectations and to continue the work that our predecessors have done over the past 15 years.

I also offer my final gratitude to Heather Wlochowski and Nurun Nahar; you have genuinely helped me so much as I grow into my position as Chair. They were with me for every step; without them, the commission would be missing a crucial part of what helps us flow as a community. I pass on the torch to my excellent Vice-Chair, Feeha Amir, and I am so excited to see and support the new accomplishments that will follow under her leadership. So, for the last time, I would like to say my name is Janzé Richardson, and I am the 2023-2024 Chair of the Manchester Youth Commission. Being a part of the Manchester Youth Commission has been a fantastic journey and an honor. Thank you!



## 2023-2024 Manchester Youth Commission

### ***Chair:***

Janzé Richardson

### ***Vice-Chair:***

Feeha Amir

### ***Secretaries:***

Nazia Hussain

Looma Taha

### ***Treasurer:***

Gabriel Rader

### ***Attendance Officer:***

Sophia Belisle

### ***Public Relations Officers:***

Rabia Chaudhry

Sapphira Costa

Isabella Lagos

### ***Commissioners:***

Evelyn Anglin

Pierre Cabonita

Bailey Downey

Mia Hernandez

Tashin Huq

Angelina Khner

Katherine Matute

Maisur Oboydullah

Tanner Pierce

Evelys Munoz Rosas

Natalie Rutar

### ***Staff Advisors:***

Nurun Nahar

Heather Wlochowski

