

**Center for
Childhood
Resilience**

Resilient Kids. Stronger Communities. Brighter Futures.

Northwestern Medicine
Feinberg School of Medicine

 **Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children's Hospital of Chicago**
Pritzker Department of
Psychiatry and Behavioral Health

Charting the Course: Mapping the Future toward Healthy Minds, Healthy Communities

Panelists: Tara Gill, Ph.D., Eleanor Bowen, Mireya Lozano, and Kyler Lehrbach, M.A.

Video segment: Abhinav Anne & Sai Gabonte

Panel Discussion at ILCHF Conference, Hyatt Lodge Oak Brook, IL
September 24, 2025

Agenda and Objectives

Agenda:

- Overview of youth advocacy and youth involvement with a children's hospital and other state organizations
- Youth voice through the Hart Ladder of Youth Engagement
- Panel discussion with youth advocacy experts & youth representation
- Next steps for leaders who plan to develop and implement youth advocacy efforts and councils

Objectives:

1. Learn the different levels of youth participation "from tokenism to citizenship"
2. Learn how various youth have and continue to advocate for mental health awareness/access
3. Reflect on ways to uplift youth voice in advocacy efforts

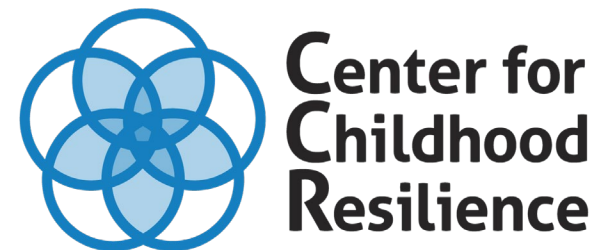
Meet our Panelists and Contributors



Tara Gill, Ph.D., Clinical Community Psychologist/Moderator
Center for Childhood Resilience, Lurie Children's Hospital
Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University



Kyler Lehrbach, M.A., Predoctoral Intern
Temple University
CCR Community Rotation, Lurie Children's Hospital



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ICMHP Youth Council: An example of structured statewide youth mental health advocacy efforts

State Senator Mike Simmons conceived of a Youth Council and placed in statute

Funds from IDPH have supported ICMHP Youth Council for the initial cohorts and now has transitioned over to IDPH for governance

Lurie Children's convened the ICMHP Youth Council in 2023, along with ICMHP governance

2025 Youth Council, comprised of 6 youth and 4 Community partners ended in July and will begin to recruit in December 2025



YOUTH COUNCIL

The ICMHP Youth Council is seeking youth participants (age 16-24) who are passionate about improving mental health across the state and advocating for their peers. Interested individuals can apply to serve on the ICMHP youth council or can be nominated by an adult professional who serves youth or by a caregiver.

*All selected youth will receive a stipend of \$595.

Timeline: 6 monthly virtual sessions (February 2025 - July 2025), including onboarding & orientation session, four working sessions, and presentations at ICMHP Board meeting (July 2025).

*Sessions will be coordinated during after school hours (4:30 - 6:30 pm) times & dates TBD.

Application period

- Now - January 3, 2025
- Interviews: January 13 - 24, 2025
- Notification of Selection: January 28, 2025

Contact: Dr. Tara Gill
(tgill@luriechildrens.org)
Center for Childhood Resilience

Steven Rosado
(steven@praxisinst.com)
Praxis Institute

Center for Childhood Resilience
Lurie Children's Mental Health Partnership

IDPH

Ellie Bowen



- Resides in Germantown, IL, a small town in southern Illinois
- Senior at Breese Central Community High
- Multi-talented as an athlete (cross-country runner and weight-lifter), musician, and scholar
- Lived experiences with family and community mental health challenges/suicide
- Future aspirations: Nursing, specializing in wound care and pain management
- Desire to follow in mother's footsteps by serving the community; mother is social worker in substance abuse

Mireya Lozano

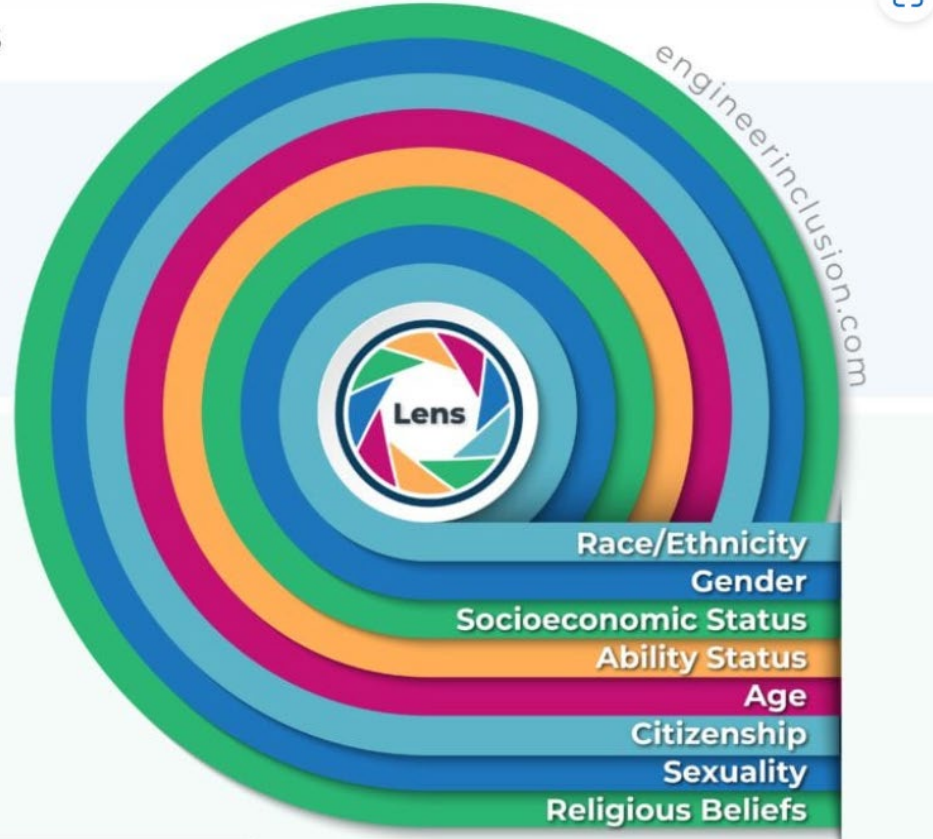


- Resides in Chicago, representing Little Village, where her family has roots going back to her father's generation
- Junior at Lane Tech College Prep, an academically competitive high school
- Active in creative arts and extracurricular activities: Co-President of a Student-Led Salsa Dance Club and the majorette dance team
- Future aspirations: Mental Health field, as a psychiatric nurse
- Uses a community lens to understand the world and serve as an advocate in the community, with an awareness of how oppression and segregation impact generational patterns of mental illness and stress

Positionality

Positionality is

- 1) the social and political context that creates your identity and
- 2) how your identity influences and biases your perception of and outlook on the world.



- We are a diverse collective of mental health and youth advocates with multiple identities

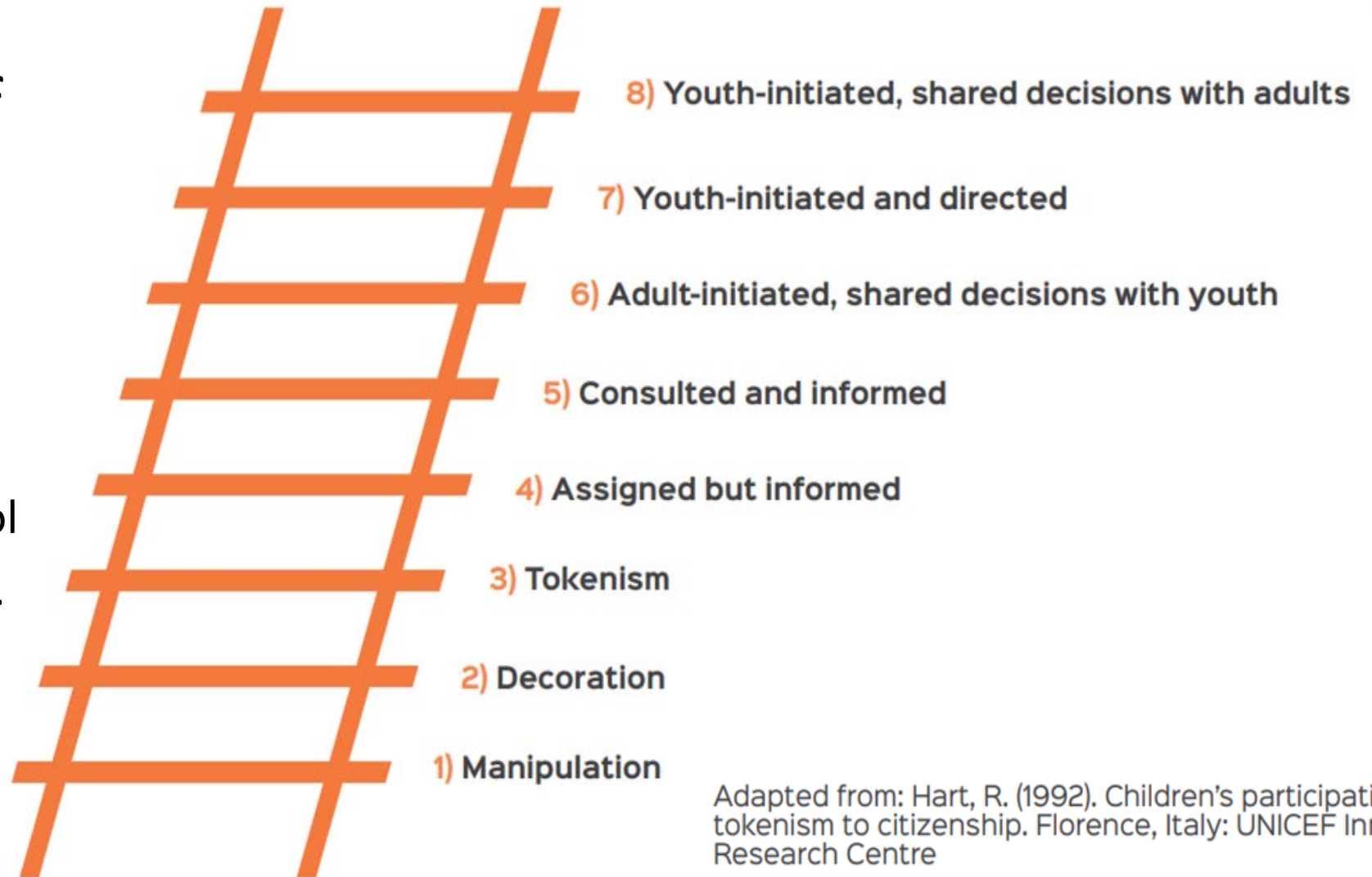
Opening/Ice Breaker: Taking you way back!

- What defined you in High School?
 - What were your interests?
 - What clubs were you involved with as a student?
 - What was important to you?



Hart's Ladder of Participation

We **must** be
willing to let go of control
And allow youth to climb.



Adapted from: Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

The State of Mental Health for Illinois Youth

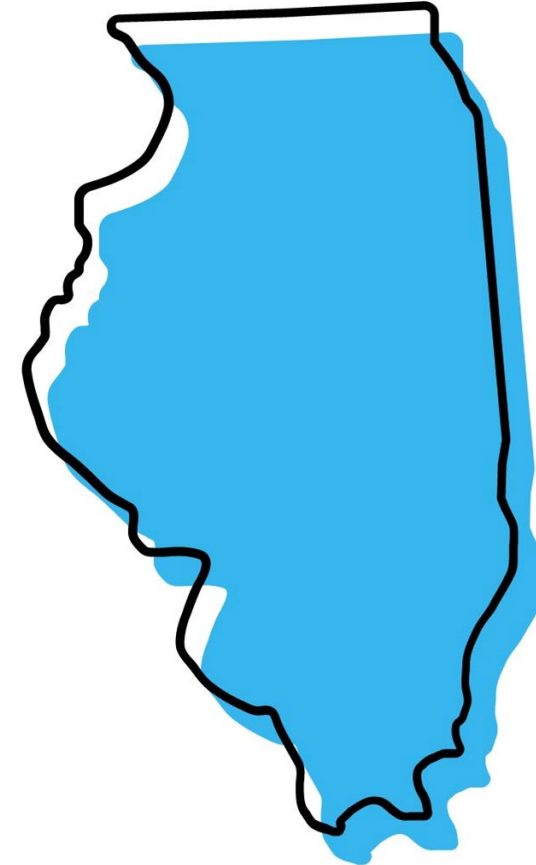
STRENGTHS:

- Illinois is a leader in school-based mental health, despite challenges in implementation of some of the proposed policy (e.g. 1st to adopt SEL standards and now leading with universal mental health screening)

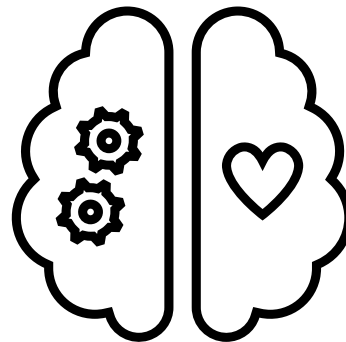
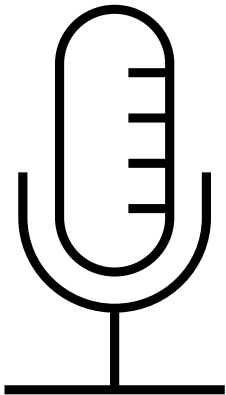
CHALLENGES:

- Public health crisis, which impacts everyone...suggesting that we need a collective effort to address these challenges (Surgeon General's Report on Youth Mental Health, 2021)
- 42% of Illinois high school youth reported having **felt sad or hopeless** almost every day for two or more weeks in a row during the 12 months before the survey – *YRBS 2021*
- 20.3% of Illinois high school youth reported **seriously considering attempting suicide** in the 12 months before the 2021 survey – *YRBS 2021*
- In 2022, 83 children ages of 10-19 died by suicide — more than **one every 4 days**

[\(Asplund, 2023\)](#)



What did you learn about mental health in your community?

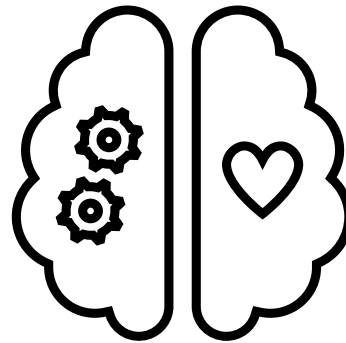
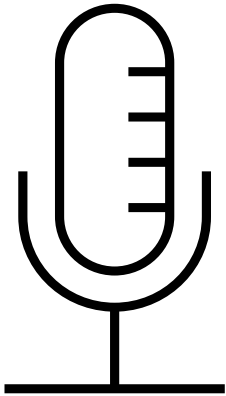


Ellie Bowen: Kids Talk to Kids

Local examples and/or research that supports this idea:

- The greatest common sentiment I found during my local research was that my peers feel the most held back from mental health assistance by local stigma and financial barriers.
 - Some other common concerns were a lack of trust for providers and a small number of local providers.
- According to Data USA 11.7% of all children in Clinton County live in poverty.
- According to the KIDS COUNT Data Center, there were 7,838 children in Clinton County in 2022, which affects counseling services for students and their ability to connect to their counselor
 - Some Middle and High Schools in Clinton County share a counselor
 - Some only have one counselor for hundreds of kids, or no counselor at all
 - Some schools have to hire in local therapists to come in separately, sometimes only two days a week.

Questions from Moderator & Audience



Profiles of Student-Initiated Mental Health Advocates: Abhinav Anne



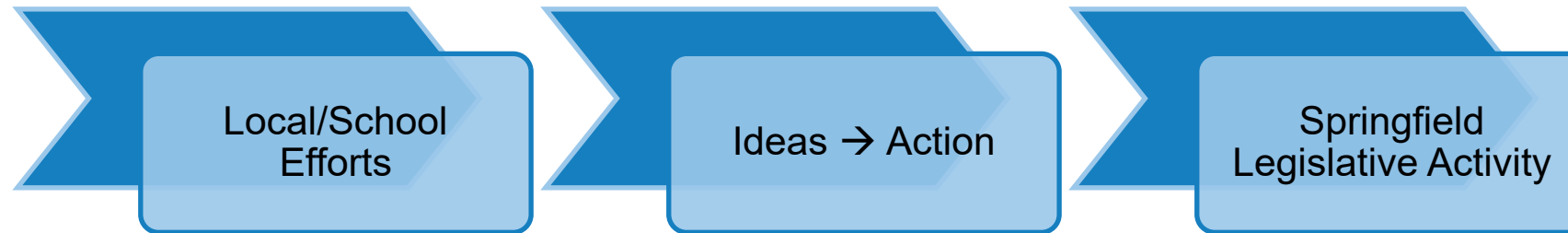
- Senior at Neuqua Valley High School, Naperville, IL (former IMSA student)
- Youth accomplishments:
 - Journalist committed to advancing equity in children's health and education by way of advancing policy
 - Youngest member of the World Health Organization, serving on their Youth Council and the Global Technology Advisory Group
 - Co-authored and helped advance SB1560, the first law in the nation to require no-cost mental health screenings in schools, reaching more than 1.5 million students. working directly with lawmakers to include mental health curricula in schools
 - Youth Advisor to Harvard University's *Mental Health for All Lab*, where he supports the EMPOWER Project, an initiative scaling digital psychosocial training to more than one million frontline health providers worldwide
- Future aspirations: Research and policy focus, which was reinforced by serving as an intern with the Illinois Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative. Efforts included contributing to statewide systems reform by helping develop data-driven contracting and procurement strategies that close service gaps and expand equitable access to care.

Profiles of Student-Initiated Mental Health Advocates: Sai Ganbote

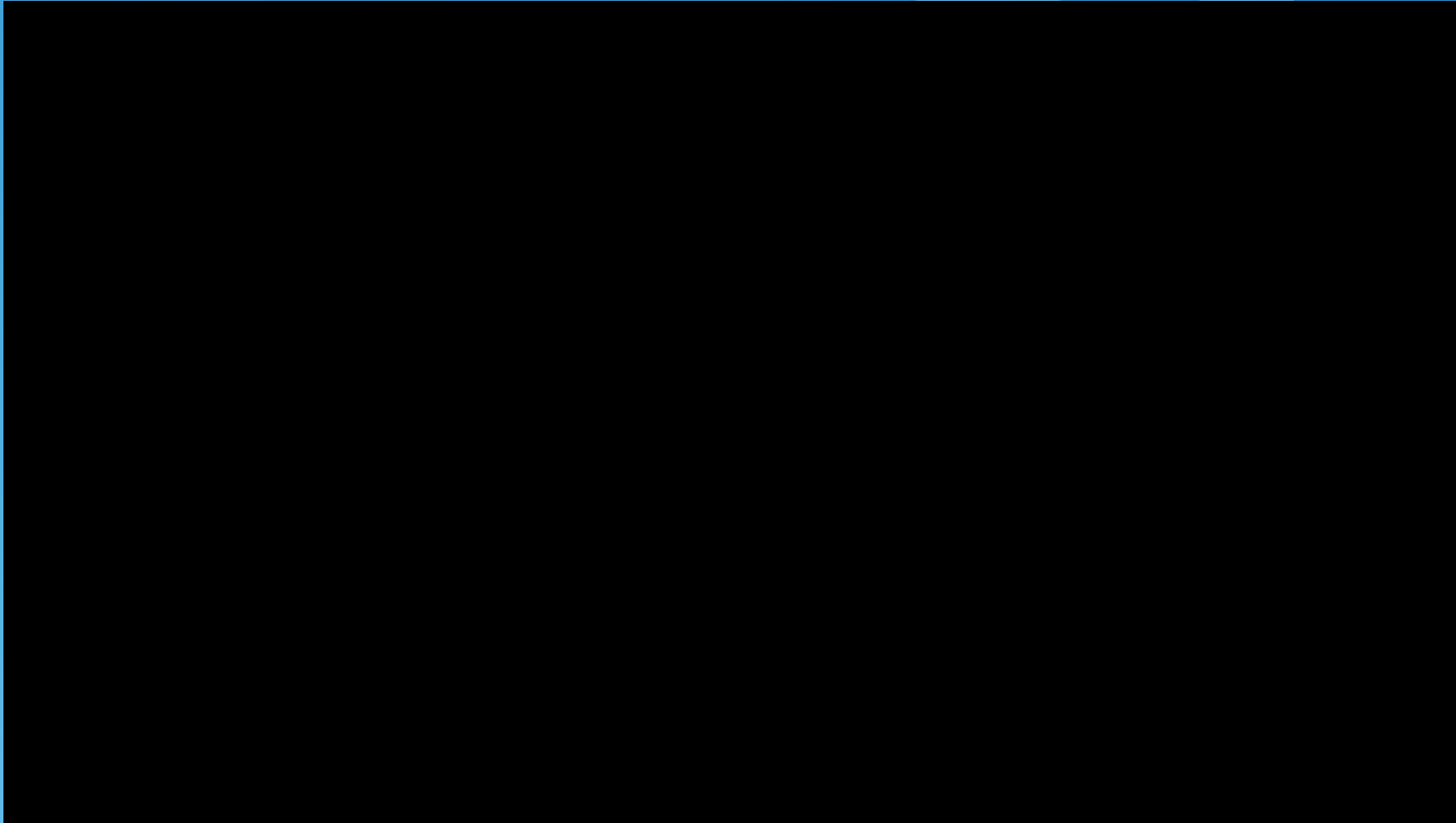


- Senior at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA)
- Student with many roles:
 - Researcher, healthcare innovator, and youth advocate committed to advancing equity in medicine; conducts neuroimaging and implementation science research at Northwestern University and Stanford University, studying neurodegeneration using AI-decoded brain imaging.
 - Co-founder of Youth 4 Neuro Chicago, which expands access to neuroscience education and mental health advocacy for students across the city.
 - President of the Aurora Youth Council, connecting over students to citywide opportunities, has interned with a U.S. Congressman, organized national conferences with the Society of Critical Care Medicine, and secured funding for mental health initiatives.
- Public health Accomplishments:
 - Co-authored a mental health education bill for Illinois students, engagement with the American Public Health Association, Mental Health America, NAMI Illinois/NAMI Community of Practice, and Brookstone Conferences
- Hobbies:
 - Pickleball, basketball, and badminton with her friends.

Youth Voices from Youth-Directed Mental Health Advocacy: IMSA and Beyond



Video: Mental Health Advocates discuss their Youth-Directed Journey



Pathways of support for youth mental health advocacy: Adult efforts

- ✓ Legislation
- ✓ Training and mentorship
- ✓ Access and connections
- ✓ Funding for operations and student stipends
- ✓ Policy maker and expert engagement

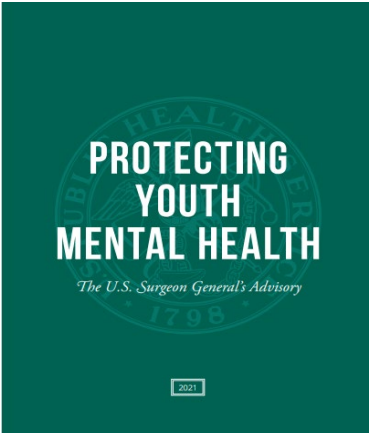
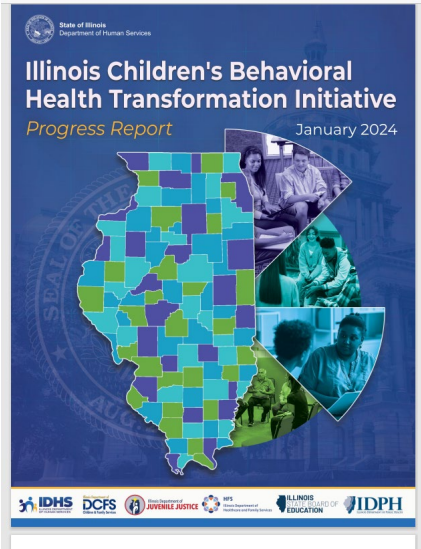
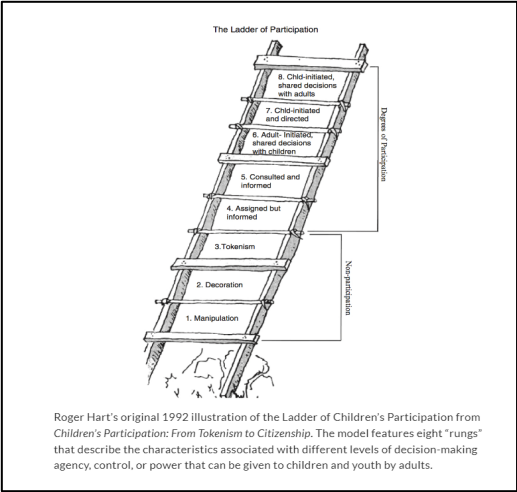
What else is needed?

- Sustainable plans for youth engagement
- **Funding** to support structured activities
 - Youth councils
 - Advisory Boards
- Collaboration across institutions and organizations
- Opportunities for skill development and training across the state

Call to Action: What can you do?



Resources and References



Scan to
access MH
Resources



Learn More About Healing Centered Illinois Efforts

**Share your contact
info via this
engagement survey
to stay up-to-date
on the initiative and
collaboration
opportunities.**

**HCITF Engagement
Survey**



Contact Information

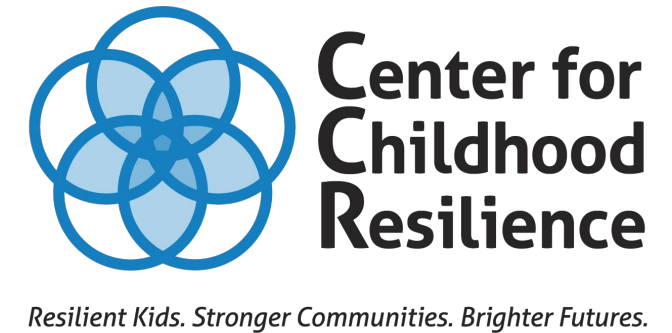
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Lurie Contributors:

Kyler Lehrbach, MA: klehrbach@luriechildrens.org

Tara Gill, PhD: tgill@luriechildrens.org

For more information, visit our website, www.childhoodresilience.org