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Schultz Family Foundation Invests in Youth to Change the Conversation about Poverty and Economic Mobility

University of San Diego, Wayne State University, and YR Media receive \$100,000 grants to elevate youth voices

SEATTLE, WA (June 10, 2020) – [The Schultz Family Foundation](#) today announced investments in three organizations to support innovative projects that will elevate diverse stories and voices of youth to redefine poverty and economic mobility in America. The University of San Diego's Children's Advocacy Institute, Wayne State University, and YR Media will each receive \$100,000 as part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's [Voices for Economic Opportunity Grand Challenge](#), an initiative supported by eight philanthropic organizations.

The Challenge is designed to dispel misconceptions about poverty and opportunity and to replace them with the factual accounts and stories of those who experience it. With tens of millions of Americans newly unemployed due to COVID-19, and a nation plagued by racism and injustice, the need to listen to those impacted by poverty and create a shared understanding of the structural barriers to economic mobility is greater than ever.

Twenty-eight organizations from 18 states and the District of Columbia will receive funding to share diverse voices and ideas that shift the national dialogue. The Schultz Family Foundation is supporting three projects to empower youth to tell their stories:

- [University of San Diego's Children's Advocacy Institute](#) – **Fostering Fairness** will launch a peer-to-peer education campaign to raise awareness of the unfair policies that prevent former foster youth from escaping poverty. Around 20,000 young adults age out of foster care each year in the U.S.; members of this population, which includes an overrepresentation of African American or Latino youth, suffer disproportionately from mental health problems and have little preparation and support to become self-sufficient. They have identified several unique barriers faced by this youth population, including asset caps while they are in care, the redirection of their money to the state to pay for the cost of care, and the lack of family support. They will provide training and resources to help a group of former foster youth share their stories with their peers using selected online platforms.
- [Wayne State University](#) – **Shifting Urban Narratives** in the U.S. will showcase the inspiring stories of young innovators in Detroit who overcame hardship and carved out opportunities in community development projects, especially amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. They will recruit fifteen individuals from diverse backgrounds between 18 and 24 years old who are involved in transformative projects around the city. The young changemakers will learn how to effectively document their daily lives navigating social and economic adversity in the city using photos and videos to also capture their leadership and belonging. The storytellers will work with video and graphic editors to produce a documentary and photo collages that reflect their experiences and vision, which will be presented at a public exhibition at the university or a local museum.

- [YR Media](#) – **The Speak Your Truth Project** will support young people to produce stories describing how their lives have been affected by foster care and the juvenile justice system to counter stereotypes and engage diverse audiences. Young people living in poverty are at greater risk of being incarcerated or in foster care, both circumstances which often further perpetuate poverty. Their personal stories are powerful illustrations of the complex causes of poverty and the widespread impact it has while also highlighting their resilience and strength. These insights, when paired and shared, can disrupt deeply entrenched stereotypes. YR Media has experience working closely with these vulnerable young people and have developed a media production process that is empathetic and respectful to their circumstances. Using their approach and network, YR Media will produce at least four pieces containing personal narratives as well as social media content for distribution via their youth-run platform and distribution partners.

“Young people are America’s greatest untapped assets, and we must invest in their future,” said Sheri Schultz, president of the Schultz Family Foundation. “We’re committed to leveling the playing field in the face of growing inequality and disparity of opportunity. These grants will bring the voices and experiences of diverse youth to a national audience and deepen our understanding of how to support their success.”

“These days many of us face serious challenges, such as unemployment, housing uncertainty, and financial insecurity. Sadly, for youth aging out of foster care, these challenges are nothing new. These and other obstacles are commonplace for them, in great part due to policies that inhibit their ability to attain self-sufficiency after leaving care,” said Elisa Weichel, Administrative Director/Senior Staff Attorney of the Children’s Advocacy Institute of the University of San Diego School of Law. “Our project, Fostering Fairness, will enable former foster youth to educate their peers about barriers they face and facilitate advocacy to remove those barriers. We look forward to working with our funder, the Schultz Family Foundation, as we work together to help former foster youth escape poverty and achieve financial security.”

The Grand Challenge is part of a multi-funder, multiyear plan to examine economic mobility and opportunity in this country, to create tools to help everyone better understand the factors that lead to greater economic mobility in their own neighborhoods, and to craft and test strategies for changing the outlook for people experiencing poverty.

Launched in September 2019, more than 1,200 ideas were submitted, and grant recipients were chosen with input from expert reviewers. Co-funding the project are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Schultz Family Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Omidyar Network, Raikes Foundation, and Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

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About Schultz Family Foundation

The Schultz Family Foundation, established by Sheri and Howard Schultz, aims to unlock America’s potential, one individual and one community at a time. It is building a world where all young people are valued, engaged, and inspired in their lives and in their communities. Investing in innovative, scalable solutions, and partnerships, the foundation focuses its efforts on communities with enormous promise. Visit SchultzFamilyFoundation.org for more information.