

Stockton youth learn the ropes of environmental justice advocacy



BACKGROUND

This case study explores how TCC funds for youth engagement have built local capacity to tackle environmental injustices. The case study does so through the lens three Stockton natives: a project partner who used TCC funds to launch a youth leadership program and two graduates of that program. For more on Stockton's broader Community Engagement Plan, see [page 43](#).

Interviews for this case study were conducted in October 2021.

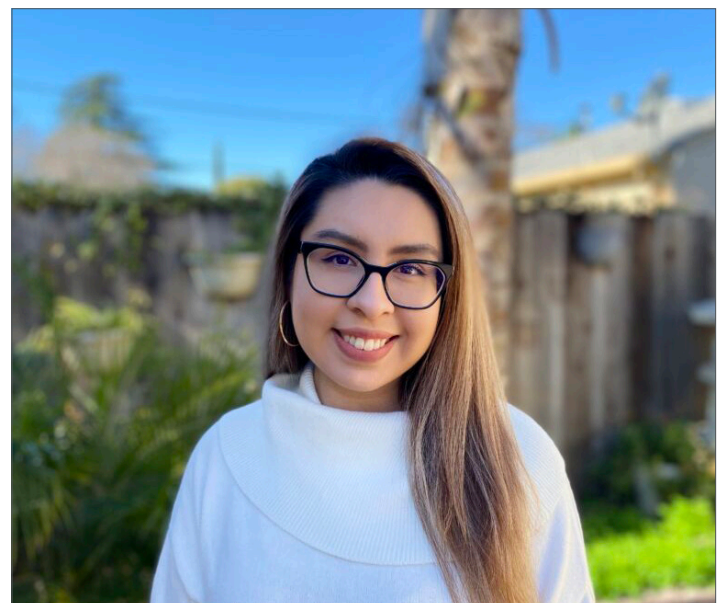
Zoom recording of a Stockton Rising youth engagement session in April 2021. Photo credit: Little Manila Rising

BIANETTE PEREZ is a Stockton native committed to helping fellow first-generation college students succeed. After earning her bachelor's degree in Chicana Studies at UCLA, she was awarded a Stockton Urban Revitalization Fellowship to return to her hometown and work at Little Manila Rising. During her fellowship, Perez helped Little Manila Rising promote a book about the life and work of Larry Itliong, a Filipino American who co-founded the United Farmer Workers union. The larger goal of the campaign was to improve educational outcomes for students of color by better integrating the histories of marginalized communities within school curricula.

Now, Perez holds a regular position at Little Manila Rising as the Youth Programs Director. In that role, she leads the organization's effort to build capacity among Stockton's youth to advocate for social justice. As part of that effort, Perez is funded by TCC to coordinate an environmental justice (EJ) workshop series in which 30 young Stocktonians (ages 17 to 24) facilitate discussions on topics such as soil contamination, air pollution, health impacts, and civic engagement. The goal was to develop leadership skills among participants and also equip them to be EJ messengers in their community.

Perez has also benefited from the training herself. She's gained new expertise on a host of environmental topics and has built deeper relationships with other TCC partners. Going forward, Perez hopes to leverage the EJ workshop

series to develop a more robust youth employment program at Little Manila Rising, or what she refers to as building out the "school to social justice pipeline."



Bianette Perez, coordinator of the Stockton Rising youth engagement sessions. Photo credit: Urban Waters Learning Network

"My academic background is in ethnic studies, not the sciences or environmental justice, so coordinating this program has been beneficial for me as well, I'm learning about a wide range of new topics alongside the participants."

BIANETTE PEREZ



Karlaine Francisco, an environmental justice advocate trained by Little Manila Rising. Photo credit: Karlaine Francisco

“My goal was to better understand what it means to be an environmental justice advocate and to share that knowledge with my community ... Now I feel qualified to teach others what I learned.”

KARLAINE FRANCISCO

RAZIEL (“RACHEL”) RAMIL is a recent graduate of UC Davis, where she studied community and regional development, and has returned to Stockton to launch her career in environmental justice advocacy. She was first exposed to the topic of environmental justice in one of her college courses. After graduating, Ramil was eager to learn more about the topic, and was drawn to the Little Manila Rising workshop series because it applied the lens of environmental justice to the issues confronting her hometown, such as poor air quality and chronic asthma.

During the workshop series, Ramil facilitated a session entitled “Make Your Voice Heard!” in which she presented on advocacy strategies for neighborhood improvements. She also moderated a breakout group in which she and her peers identified the top issues in their community, the key decision makers who exert influence on those issues, and an agenda for meeting with those decision makers.

Now, Ramil is employed at the California Center for Civic Participation, where she is helping curate an environmental justice program called Green Focus. The program exposes Sacramento high school students to environmental policy and career opportunities in the field. In the long run, she hopes to get more involved with policymaking in order to reduce disparities within her community.

KARLAINE FRANCISCO is one of the young adults who participated in Little Manila Rising’s environmental justice workshop series. The granddaughter of immigrant farmworkers, Francisco was particularly interested in learning more about the connection between agricultural pollution and farmworker health, and took the lead on facilitating a session on soil contamination. She credits her participation in the workshop series as teaching her research and collaboration skills, as well as providing her a sense of community and connection with her hometown as she transitioned to college as a freshman at UC Berkeley.

Francisco hopes to build upon her experience at Little Manila Rising by pursuing a career in environmental law and policy with a focus on health. Her motivation for doing so is to ensure that environmental policies protect and benefit low-income and immigrant communities. Francisco plans to use her time at UC Berkeley to explore different professional vocations for doing just that, whether that be a practicing attorney, an academic, or an educator based in the community.



Raziel Ramil, another environmental justice advocate trained by Little Manila Rising. Photo credit: Raziel Ramil

“I want to pay it forward, and am integrating lessons from my training in Stockton to help students in other parts of the state to become environmental justice advocates in their own communities.”

RAZIEL RAMIL