



FRESH TRACKS

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Community,

I hope that as you read this, you are finding time to care for yourself and your loved ones physically, mentally, and emotionally. 2021 challenged us in ways that asked a lot from us. I'm writing to express my appreciation and gratitude for each of you, and for your tireless efforts to make the world a better place this past year.

As I reflect on the recent accomplishments of Fresh Tracks at the Aspen Forum For Community Solutions, I am once again humbled by—and profoundly grateful for—your dedication to our mission and to the people and communities with whom we work. It is because of your boundless commitment that we have been able to find spaces for impact and action throughout the ongoing pandemic surrounded by so much uncertainty. Indeed, as COVID-19 cases rise once again in the U.S. and the Omicron variant spreads, I know that each of you is dealing with a renewed level of uncertainty right now. Thank you for always putting health and safety first as we continue to do our best for community connections that uplift the healing power of culture and the outdoors for civic action. I am also inspired by community and connection, both in-person and virtual. Many of you reading this note have become close allies and friends, but we have not shared a meal. Prior to travel restrictions, I counted myself fortunate and privileged to share time and space with as many of our partners and leaders as possible. The last two years have reminded me of the value of in-person time and inspired a renewed sense of gratitude for access to technology that allows for connections to happen, despite distance. Thanks to this technology, we are able to connect and convey emotions just as real, meaningful, and impactful. However, I too look forward to the day we can all gather and share a good laugh and meal.

2021 was a year of community for Fresh Tracks. Our Youth & Young Adult Wellbeing Measure project is reaching a significant milestone. The Outdoor Equity Project in partnership with Native Americans in Philanthropy is a rally point for an innovative approach to intersectionality and impact. Our training partnership with The Native Youth Climate Adaptation Leadership Congress was formalized and will go into its second year in 2022. We welcomed a new member to the Fresh Tracks team, Andrea Wagner, who is serving as a Program Associate. In partnership with Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF), we are supporting youth-led solutions that focus on healing-centered organizing using the outdoors, and we continue to support the growth of the Indigenous and Tribal Community of Practice by welcoming three new partners. The anchor to all of this is our Fresh Tracks Network. Made up of over 250 trained community leaders, it spans the country from Barrow, AK to New York City, Albuquerque, NM to Flint, MI and many more communities in between. We exist because of you and together, we are building a path to equity and justice rooted in the healing power of culture and the outdoors.

In 2022, I hope you find the time to connect with those places that restore and bring wellness into your life, hopefully in the outdoors. I hope you have the resources, tools, and emotional capacity to spend time with those that are close to you and maybe meet and create new connections rooted in a shared vision for justice and wellbeing. Thank you for your commitment to this, our Fresh Tracks community.

Juan Martinez,
Senior Fellow at the Forum for Community Solutions
and Fresh Tracks Director



Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Project

Time and again, youth and young adults tell us,

“I am more than the worst thing that ever happened to me.”

In response, the Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Project is supporting the development of innovative well-being and healing measures by youth and young adults (Y/YA) of color that incorporate their lived experiences. Through a participatory action research process, the youth work to identify how culture, values and circumstances nurture the well-being of Y/YA of color and provide a framework for investing in their social, emotional and physical well-being.

In 2021, groups participating in The Wellbeing Project:

- ⇒ Completed a virtual series of Uhuru Youth Scholars workshops, which introduced participants to a research framework that interrupts the dominant Euro-centric research paradigm by placing Afro-centric ways of knowing, culture, and community values at the center of inquiry and evidence.
- ⇒ Completed a virtual series of ‘research camps,’ focusing on youth participatory action research processes that center lived experiences as powerful data to ignite action and advocacy and social justice reform.
- ⇒ Created a research plan to develop a Wellness measure for their cultural identity group that leverages culture, history, values, ancestral knowledge systems, and current lived experiences as central data points for defining, measuring and ensuring equitable wellness outcomes among Y/YA of color.
- ⇒ Collected qualitative data through multiple sessions, with a sampling frame that included Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions yearly convenings, Fresh Tracks virtual convenings, and others.

Summary data from this project will provide end-users valuable information about the strengths and needs of Y/YA of color in their community. End-users include youth-led advocacy groups, Tribal youth and councils, neighborhood advocacy groups, community-based service providers, schools, youth-serving networks, developers of evidence-informed programs, funders, and even public systems like juvenile probation programs or foster care.

A report of preliminary findings will be developed for the community and partners in the spring of 2022.

Outdoor Equity Project

In 2021, Fresh Tracks was proud to initiate and develop The Outdoor Equity Project in partnership with Native Americans in Philanthropy.

The Outdoor Equity Project works to strengthen equity through the outdoors. Across our nation, young leaders of color have called for action during this time of racial reckoning. These organizers come from communities that have experienced generations of trauma and oppression, resulting in deep inequities in their everyday lives and a lack of opportunity. The broader public is showing the needed political will to transform the systems that uphold these inequities. The outdoor environment has the power to play a much stronger role in systems change through policy. It promotes positive health, emotional, and mental wellbeing, cultural and spiritual connection, and community health. It is a space free of judgment and oppression. And, as demand for innovative solutions to the climate crisis increases, it can be a pathway to education, innovation, and jobs.

In 2021, the Outdoor Equity Project:

- ⇒ Communicated with several funders about the intersection of youth, the outdoors, equity, Native culture, and the role of philanthropy in the collective pursuit of a healthy environment for people, communities, and the planet.
- ⇒ Began planning a new Outdoor Youth Power Building Roundtable for 2022, composed of diverse youth leaders, equity and environmental funders, and innovative organizational partners across the country.
- ⇒ Began developing a theory of change that will provide a framework for equity grounded in the power of the outdoors. This theory of change will help us build a movement of diverse grassroots programs that will inform strategies for funders and policymakers and strengthen the diversity of leadership in the outdoor and environmental funding sectors.



Native Youth Climate Adaptation and Leadership Congress

Fresh Tracks is the training partner of Native Youth Climate Adaptation and Leadership Congress (NYCALC), which is a federal and non-governmental collaborative that invites Native communities to work together to address conservation challenges in a changing environment.

NYCALC provides training in leadership principles and conservation skills for the next generation of native leaders (rising high-school seniors) and their communities. In preparation for NYCALC, the trainer team met weekly to review roles and curriculum, and to learn tools for connection and mentoring the participants during the Congress. They were introduced to training on roles and responsibilities, group dynamics and icebreakers, leadership development, community organizing, civic engagement, and developing a narrative for change. The Trainer team served as mentors to students throughout the event and supported NYCALC Faculty in facilitating the development of the community adaptation leadership skills of all of the Native youth participants throughout the Congress.

Trainer responsibilities and contributions included:

- ⇒ **Leading connection sessions and building relationships with NYCALC participants**
- ⇒ **Leading training sessions on resumes, interviews, and entrepreneurship (in partnership with faculty) for NYCALC participants**
- ⇒ **Serving as positive role models by communicating and participating in the chat during the virtual sessions**
- ⇒ **Representing their culture by contributing during the culture share sessions; serving as mentors by sharing personal experiences and their developing career journey**

The Trainer Team continues to meet in order to update curriculums, develop new ideas for NYCALC 2022, and to collaborate on ideas to mentor the participants as they take action in their communities.

Opportunity Youth Forum Programming

Fresh Tracks is proud to be a program of the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Forum.

Indigenous & Tribal Community of Practice

The Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) Tribal Community of Practice supports community-driven levers of change at the intersection of the community's need for meaningful knowledge sharing and the capacity to generate positive, culturally relevant outcomes. The Community of Practice was created to strengthen collective impact and community collaboration and, moreover, to share what is learned. To do this, a "Community Learning Agenda" was created and updated with input by members of the Community of Practice. This learning agenda seeks to answer fundamental questions to address community pathways and is supported by a collective of resources throughout the OYF staff and capacity. In 2021 the learning agenda focused on data sovereignty, and in 2022, the team will develop a landscape profile showing the strengths and opportunities for impact of current community members.

Youth-Led Change and Healing Centered Organizing

The Youth-Led Change Fund (YLCF) is a new effort under the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions – Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) Radical Possibilities portfolio of emerging grants. Under the leadership of Jamiel Alexander, it seeks to deepen the commitment to youth leadership development and youth organizing approaches across the OYF network by piloting projects that infuse healing centered organizing (HCO) approaches into youth-led change efforts in OYF communities. To this end, YLCF seeks to support innovative projects that infuse HCO concepts and practices into an approach to youth-led change that goes beyond youth engagement (e.g. including youth at the collaborative table or asking youth on input into program design) to support adoption of new (or deepening of existing) organizing strategies such as base-building, advocacy campaigns, narrative change and public will-building and other efforts for youth-led policy and systems change. Fresh Tracks partners with the YLCF to support communities that are also using the healing power of culture and the outdoors as part of their proposal. A report of preliminary findings will be developed for the community and partners in the spring of 2022.

Opportunity Youth Forum Programming

The Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) held a two-part learning series in April and December: Advance Racial Equity & Environmental Justice: Opportunity, Justice, and The Power of Place.

April Convening

There is a long history of racism and discrimination against Black and Indigenous People of Color in the United States. Throughout this history, community leaders have made significant and meaningful contributions to the advancement of this country, conservation, and environmental justice, especially in the lives of young adults and communities of color.

In this April virtual convening, panelists explored the power of place, including the importance of harnessing community power that centers the most vulnerable community members, including young adults and families. They shared insights related to how communities are building on this power to sustain progress, drive momentum and prepare for deepened impact in the years ahead.

December Convening

In December, OYF held a second virtual session. The goal of this learning series was to build an understanding of the healing power of nature, especially for Black and Indigenous people and communities of color in the context of Arnold Chandler's research on structural racism. The series aimed to feature different voices and practical examples (models, approaches, and initiatives) that intersect nature, environmental justice and racial justice. The panel addressed and reframed biases around white-dominant conservationist spaces and tropes to center Indigenous people and communities of color, especially as it relates to environmental justice and protecting outdoor space. It also provided awareness of policies and advocacy paths related to securing resources for prioritizing environmental justice and healing in the outdoors.

Panelists shared their insight on what it takes to lead effective cross-system and sector collaborative work on behalf of Black and Indigenous youth and young adults. Leaders shared specific strategies aimed at addressing the current triple pandemics of the health crisis, racism and the economic downturn.

Welcome, Andrea!

Andrea Wagner is the newest member to the Fresh Tracks team and joined us in October 2021 as the Program Associate.

Andrea is a Yupik Alaskan Native from Wasilla, Alaska. She is set to receive her Bachelor's in Communications and Government and Public Policy from the University of Arizona in May 2022. Andrea is passionate about youth empowerment and leadership building. Before Fresh Tracks, she served as a Communication Associate of four years for an Alaskan-based arctic consulting company, North Star Group, that worked to build and create meaningful connections throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Throughout her youth, she has had many opportunities to build leadership skills, serving as the student advisor to the Matanuska-Borough School Board, the Cherry Blossom Princess of Alaska, and an Arctic Youth Ambassador. She aspires to help create opportunities and tools for youth to be leaders in their communities.



Thank You!



Fresh Tracks is aware that we walk on and work on Native land. Native American communities continue to thrive and lead movements for human rights today. The Fresh Tracks team acknowledges the critical and necessary step of honoring Native communities and their leadership in order to build an equitable future for all. In our work towards common goals of equity and justice, we encourage you to uncover truths of the original inhabitants of the land we all walk on.

Our work would not be possible without our incredible community of youth participants, mentors, leaders, and funders. In addition to a myriad of individuals and other organizations, we're grateful for the support of:



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