

**Mycelium
Youth Network**

Annual Reflection 2023

Published April 2024



Letter from our Executive Director



Cuallii Tonali ica nochi notlacayo,

During these difficult times, I offer my deepest prayers for those in Gaza enduring an unprecedented level of violence, and lift my voice as one among millions calling for a permanent ceasefire. Another world is possible if only we are courageous enough to help bring it into being.

I had the honor of speaking with youth activists Aniya Butler from Youth Vs Apocalypse and Sim Bilal from Youth Climate Strike LA at the closing plenary of last year's California Adaptation Forum. During their talk, I heard their clear call for adults to do more as we stand in solidarity with youth movements for climate justice and to share power with youth to co-create movements and worlds together. I heard their grief and hope as they spoke of their work, which echoed the youth we serve in Oakland and San Francisco, the youth who remind me what it means to stand in solidarity with them and plant seeds for future generations in our collective fight for climate justice.

What do we need—right now—for this call to action? How do we reconcile that commitment to create better worlds when stricken by grief and uncertainty? I hold close the words of Angela Davis: “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”

And we do. In 2023, we ushered in the Fifth National Climate Assessment at the White House by drawing nationwide attention to the critical lack of frontline community wisdom in decision-making spaces. We supported youth in launching a multi-year bioremediation project at a high school built on a toxic waste site in Oakland. We began our newest program, Data Warriors, to engage youth in decolonized research and research justice. And we dreamt up the Mycelium Youth Universe, a fantasy world where youth get to be warriors, healers, and narrators of their own histories and futures.

Through it all, your support as organizational and foundation partners has helped grow and expand Mycelium's network. As you read this Annual Reflection, I hope you realize your role in this work and be newly inspired to continue sustaining the network.

Tlazocamati, ica nochi notlacayo. Tlazocamati.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lil Milagro Henriquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Lil Milagro Henriquez
Founder and Executive Director



Letter from our Educational Director

I asked a group of our youth leaders about their hopes for 2024. Some were unsure, some shared words of fear, pessimism, and foregone conclusions, while others looked to recent moments of popular resistance. I felt discomfort lodge in my throat. Had I asked the right questions? Are we giving our youth hope? And if not, what are we doing?



I thanked them for their truth, for sharing their worries, their feelings of both hope and hopelessness. I fought the urge to reframe, find the silver lining, to convince them otherwise. And for the rest of the day, I turned those questions over in my head, worries nested in my heart. I remembered that I too felt the ache of hopelessness, that familiar pang of despair—what Rebecca Solnit describes as a form of “certainty that the future will be a lot like the present or decline from it.” Genocide unfolds, forests clearcut by the carceral state, disaster and loss—there is much to mourn.

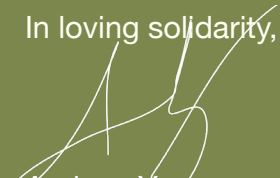
Our work must hold space for grief. And it must also, from the depths of that heartbreak, nourish the loving relationships that alchemize that grief into a rigorous commitment to all the futures we deserve. A process and practice of, as one of our young leaders Catrina Maldonado-Arias describes, “imagining myself in a world I would love to live in.”

So that’s what we’re doing, pulling these challenges into the open space of freedom dreaming. We’re readying ourselves to move from youth leadership toward youth governance. We’re refining our practices and partnerships for climate resilient schools with the aim to reach more youth and partners. And alongside youth leaders, we’re expanding our understanding of decolonized research, data, and evaluation through intergenerational exchange and practice.

The grief in our hearts, our bodies brimming over with rage—they’re a reminder of the care that’s possible, an ancestral memory that gently reminds me when I’m most unraveled, what pulls me back together is the loving relationships I tend with my community, with myself, with the land.

What are we doing?
Marissa, Margy, Tortuguita remind—
What we can. And tomorrow a little more.

In loving solidarity,



Andrew Yeung
Educational Director



OUR IMPACT

Across the SF Bay Area

Partnership Spotlight

Estuary Youth Council (EYC)

Co-developed with SF Estuary Partnership, Nuestra Casa, and Restore the Delta, EYC is a pilot youth leadership and professional development program for emerging environmental leaders from underrepresented and underserved communities in the SF Estuary watershed.

In visioning, designing, and implementing the program, we welcomed three graduates of Mycelium's Youth Leadership Council to join the inaugural cohort. Field trips and activities have included:

- Sessions on social justice healing and climate financing at the Just Futures Summit hosted by Greenlining the Block
- Historical boat tour of the South Bay's wildlife refuge Alviso Pond



Mycelium in Collaboration

We're investing in cross-sector, multi-organization partnerships for long-term impact in building climate-ready futures.

- American Society of Adaptation Professionals
- Bay Area Climate Adaptation Network
- California Adaptation Forum
- Climate Communities Network (National Academy of Medicine)
- Community-Academic Partnerships to Advance Equity-Focused Climate Action
- Estuary Youth Council
- Greenlining the Block
- SF Bay Restoration Authority Advisory Committee
- SGC Catalyst Conference Steering Committee



OUR IMPACT

At the National Level

National recognition helps BIPOC organizations like ours to scale and draw attention to emerging needs in climate education, adaptation, and resilience. Opportunities to engage government agencies and foundations nationally allows us to disrupt siloed approaches and give way to the collective synergy and fortitude we need to face our climate challenges.

With your support, Mycelium will continue to cultivate an ever-growing, boundless, and borderless network.



Partnership Spotlight

March

Mycelium leadership addresses youth socioemotional wellness and its intersections with climate resilience in Bob Doppelt's *Preventing and Healing Climate Traumas*.

August

Chapter on Mycelium published in Kylie Flanagan's *Climate Resilience*.

Mycelium's innovative Gaming for Justice program spotlighted on *CBS Evening News*.

September

Mycelium's roots in D&D featured in *Yale Climate Connections* article, "A gamer's quest to prepare kids for climate change."

November

Founder and Executive Director Lil Milagro Henriquez invited to speak at a White House panel on the rollout of the Fifth National Climate Assessment in Washington, D.C.

December

Mycelium nominated and accepted to join the 1% for the Planet Environmental Partners network.

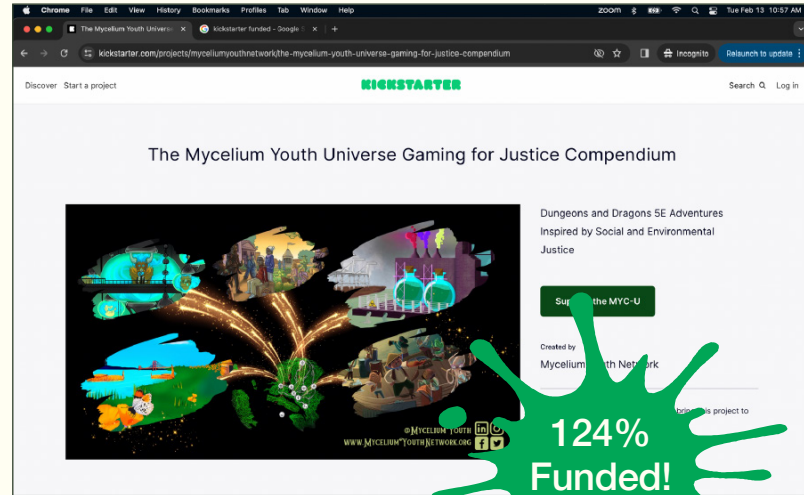


OUR IMPACT

In Public Imagination

In 2023, Gaming for Justice took the main stage, meeting the moment for radical imagination in the face of climate change.

In August, we met our fundraising goal for an anthology of original Gaming for Justice adventures in the style of Dungeons & Dragons. Designed for both classroom and recreational use, the forthcoming collection of environmental justice-themed stories will support community members to engage historical and ongoing struggles—with air pollution, rising sea levels, gentrification, and more—as well as dream up creative solutions through gameplay.



What's the Mycelium Youth Universe?

A fantasy and science fictional world told through 10 place-based stories to play through, including:

- Original artwork created by BIPOC visionaries
- Exploration of environmental issues such as deforestation through player-led world-building
- Science behind the story elaborating on specific climate challenges and solutions



OUR PROGRAMS

Key Numbers

Developed and continuously refined since Mycelium's inception, our programs blend ancestral wisdom, today's most advanced pioneering technologies, and hands-on training to provide youth with the skills to survive and thrive in a climate-challenged world.

Climate Resilient Schools

21

Hours of original CRS programming run every month

3

Title I schools served in Oakland and San Francisco

4

Elementary age-appropriate climate change units

Youth Leadership Council

33

Livable wage youth stipends in Spring + Fall 2023

2

Continuing alumni leadership opportunities

3

Climate allies selected by + engaging YLC

Gaming for Justice

96

Hours of youth D&D sessions run

16

Original maps created

7

Campaign arcs completed

Data Warriors

8

Data Warriors Youth Fellows

15

Paid hours per month for Data Warrior interns

2

Staff trainings on Critical Evaluation and Research

“

I love D&D because I get to travel to a magical world with my mind, and I can be whoever and whatever I want to be!

—“Durga,” a youth fire genasi barbarian

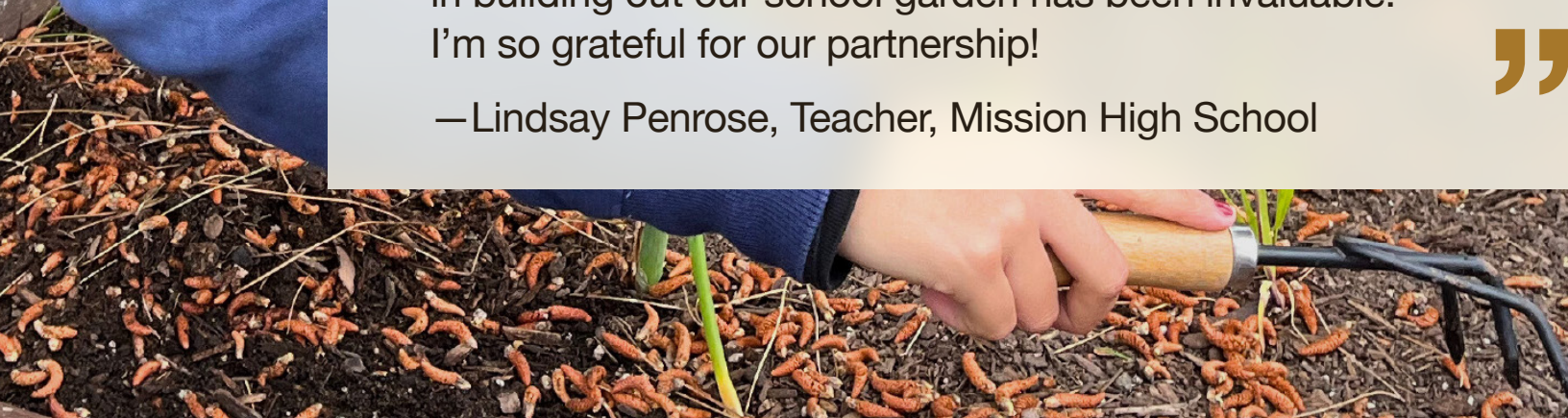
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“ Mycelium has been such a gift these past few years! The educators are deeply caring toward our students, and are highly skilled in their content. The curriculum is highly relevant and approaches complex content with context, nuance, and a lot of hope. The leadership program has supported students to flourish in designing and implementing their own projects while being fairly compensated for their work. And the support they’ve given in building out our school garden has been invaluable! I’m so grateful for our partnership!

—Lindsay Penrose, Teacher, Mission High School

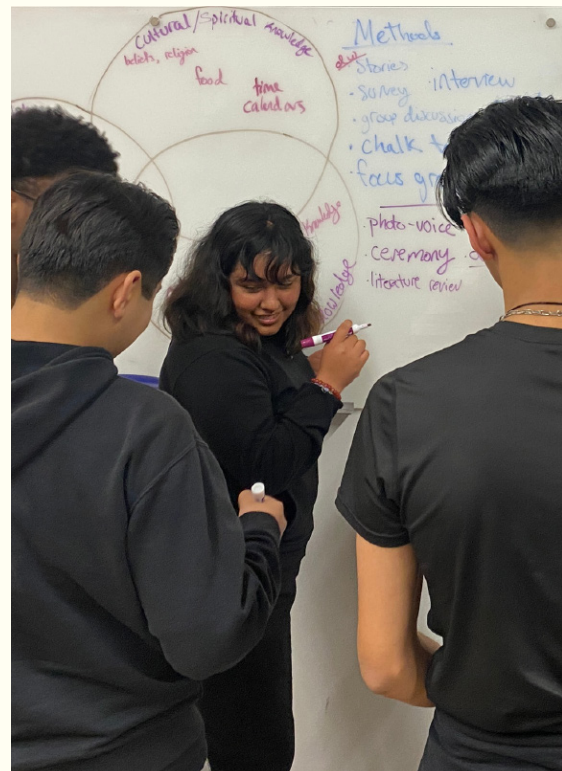


OUR PROGRAMS

Data Warriors

The evaluative center of Mycelium’s work, this paid internship for high school youth is an intergenerational program honoring the legacy of community research in environmental justice movements locally and across the U.S. Through connecting youth with powerful examples of community action research, exploring decolonized qualitative and quantitative methods, practicing instrument design, and by connecting with the land, this project supports youth in developing an expanded understanding of who can be a researcher and how data is powerful.

The world has plenty of scientists and researchers who study our communities from the outside. But what of the perspectives, expertise, imagination, and potential already present within the community? Especially among youth? Data Warriors is our way of naming the power and importance of community representatives skilled in data collection, analysis, and research. We’re troubling the binary of researcher and impacted community by engaging frontline youth, youth of color, queer youth, youth from low income neighborhoods, disabled youth, foster youth, unhoused youth, newcomer youth, and youth from mixed-status households.



Staff and Consultants

Curriculum and Evaluation Manager Maya Salsedo and Climate Research Organizer Kunal Palawat are developing and delivering the Data Warriors program with the support of indigenous evaluation specialists and academic partners.

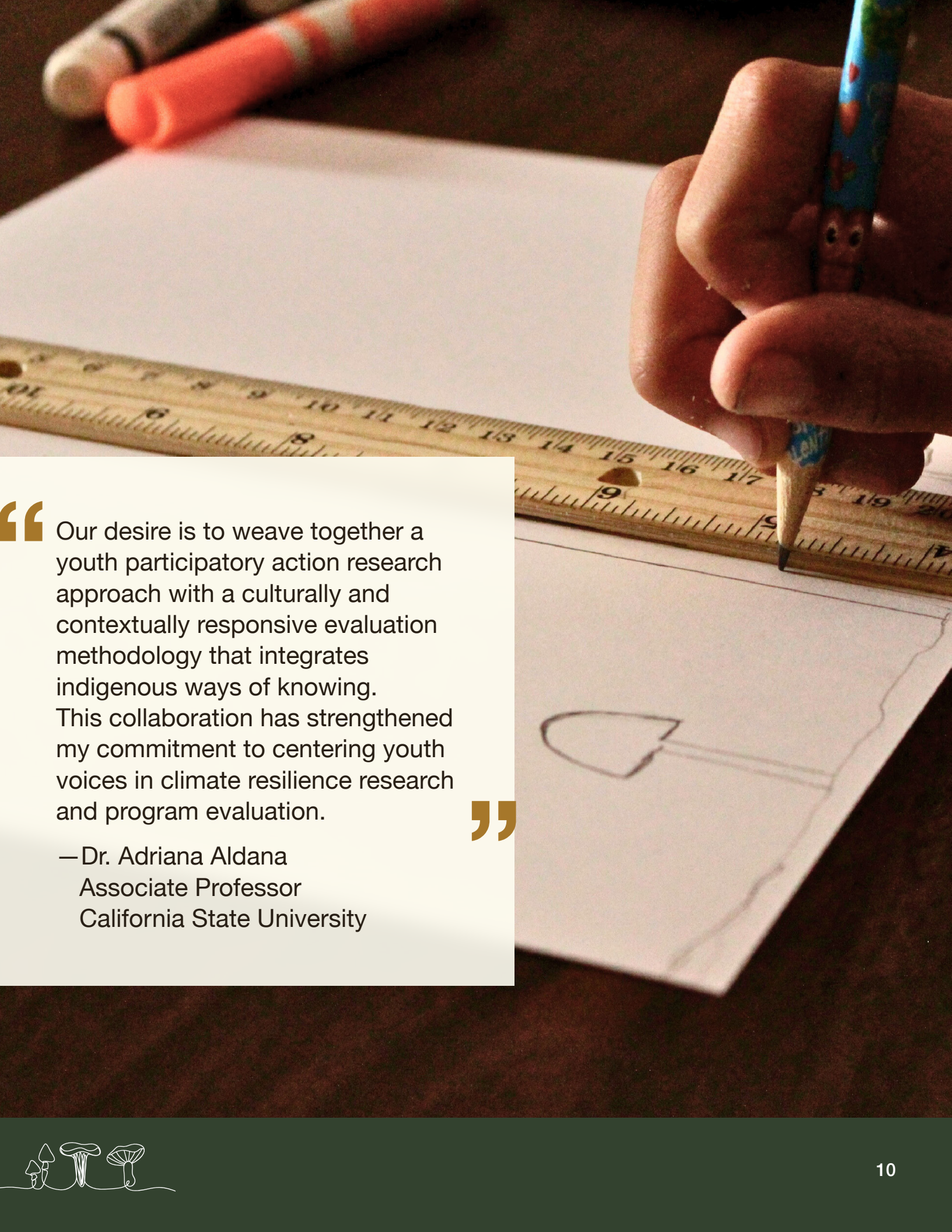
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I hope to learn about the impact of climate change, not just how it causes the sea to rise but also how it affects people in my community. I also want to learn what I can do about it, how can I take action against climate change.

”

—Data Warriors Youth Fellow





“ Our desire is to weave together a youth participatory action research approach with a culturally and contextually responsive evaluation methodology that integrates indigenous ways of knowing. This collaboration has strengthened my commitment to centering youth voices in climate resilience research and program evaluation.

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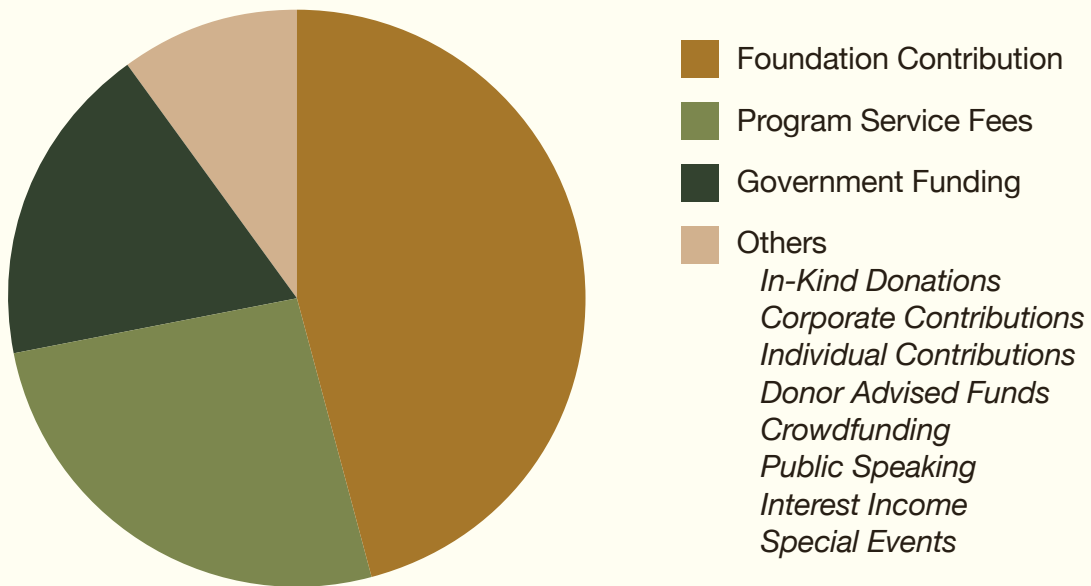
—Dr. Adriana Aldana
Associate Professor
California State University



2023 Budget and Impact

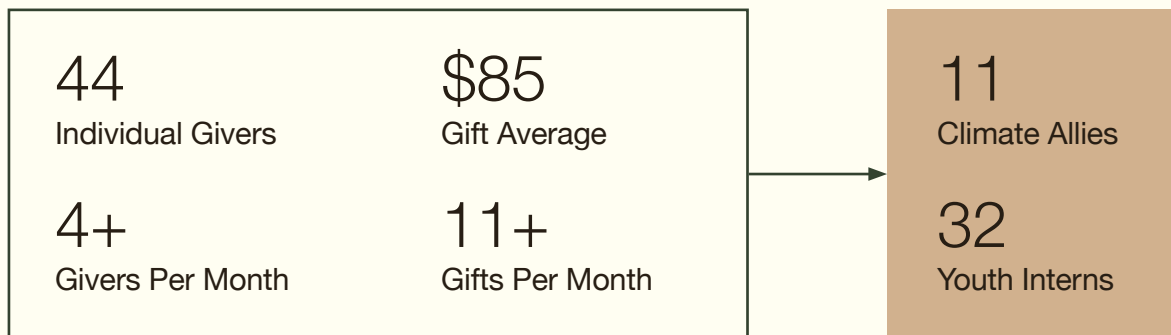
Revenue

In 2023, we raised \$787,870.60—with each dollar from individuals, corporations, and foundations going directly to building climate-just futures.



Individual Giving: Enacting Your Values

Individual giving is deliberate, intimate, personal. And we're especially touched and inspired to see continued growth year after year. This year's gifts covered climate ally and youth intern compensation.





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Mycelium’s commitment to youth-driven climate and science education has given me a new perspective on what’s possible in our schools and communities today. Lil and the Mycelium team have a deeply collaborative vision for the future, unmatched passion (and delight!) for their work, and a demonstrated ability to achieve real impact for young people. It’s an honor to support Mycelium’s efforts.

—Meagan Scaringe, Founder, Many Futures Foundation

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Appreciations



Staff

Ashia Ajani
Marcy Brown
Lil Milagro Henriquez
Rachel Hunt
René Revolorio Keith
Amber Lee
Jessica Levya
Kunal Palawat
Tao Qi
Jomar Rodriguez Ventura
Maya Salsedo
Kevin Simmonds
Andrew Yeung

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