



LIFE & WORKFORCE

Meet BGCTC's 2024 Youth of the Year!

Since 1947, Youth of the Year has been the Boys & Girls Clubs of America's premier recognition program, celebrating the extraordinary achievements of Club teens. Club members who earn the Youth of the Year title embody the values of academic excellence, health & wellness, and service leadership. They exemplify the critical impact that Boys & Girls Clubs have on the lives of young people. [Learn more about Youth of the Year.](#)

Selected among seven outstanding BGCTC youth, Calvin Vang has been named Boys & Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities (BGCTC) Youth of the Year.

Vang, a senior at Hmong College Prep Academy High School, has been a member of the East Side Club for the past two years. When Vang first joined the Club, he was timid and unsure of his worth. The Club became a safe space for Vang to step out of his comfort zone and explore his own identity. By participating in the Career Launch curriculum, Vang has been able to develop his leadership skills and put them to use by leading his peers as Volleyball Captain and obtaining his first job at the East Side Boys & Girls Club. Vang, along with a team of East Side Boys & Girls Club teens, is participating in this year's "Changemaker Challenge," a project designed to inspire and support those who aim to make a difference in their communities. Vang's project is focused on bringing awareness to the importance of self-worth and mental well-being. He cares deeply for the mental well-being of others and is always willing to lend an ear to his peers.



Vang will go on to vie for the Minnesota Youth of the Year title and a \$5,000 college scholarship from the Minnesota Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs. If Vang is named the Minnesota Youth of the Year, he will vie for the title of Midwest Regional Youth of the Year who will receive an additional \$20,000 college scholarship. Five regional finalists along with the National Military Youth of the Year will advance to the National Youth of the Year event in October 2024 to vie for the title of Boys & Girls Clubs of America's National Youth of the Year. The National Youth of the Year will receive an additional scholarship of \$50,000, a brand-new Toyota Corolla and a \$5,000 Kohl's gift card.

We are so proud of Calvin Vang and all of the other extraordinary candidates we heard from this year. To learn more about the 2024 Youth of the Year candidates, [click here.](#)



The TLC Approach

BGCA's Think, Learn, and Create Change (TLC) approach focuses on putting youth at the center of their own advocacy experiences and supports their ongoing, active engagement as change makers. The approach is divided into three phases: the "think" phase encourages youth to think about positive change, discover their passions, and identify social issues that spark their interest; the "learn" phase tasks youth with educating themselves on their chosen issue, learning who has the power to effect change, and gaining a well-rounded perspective on the matter; and the final "create change" phase supports youth in determining how they will implement their plans, how to measure success, and actively drive change in their communities.

The TLC approach is at the heart of BGCTC's NEW [Changemaker Challenge](#) a project designed to inspire and support those who aim to make a difference in their communities. Club teens move through each phase as they develop an advocacy project that has meaningful impact on a social issue they have identified. These projects will be highlighted at BGCTC's April 26 [For the Kids!](#) event.



CONNECT

BGCTC's January 9 [CONNECT](#) event highlighted Youth Voice and Advocacy efforts in BGCTC Clubs, as well as the broader communities we serve.

We were thrilled to have Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan join us to discuss the importance of youth voice and how her personal experiences growing up in Minnesota shaped how she leads today. Senator Bobby Joe Champion, a BGCTC alumnus, also joined in the discussion to share how BGCTC influenced his path to becoming a political leader.

Additionally, this CONNECT session featured teens from six BGCTC Clubs who shared the issues that matter most to them, allowing attendees the opportunity to gain deeper insight into what our youth envision for their future. Here is a sampling of issues BGCTC teens are delving into as part of the Changemaker Challenge that will be highlighted at our April 26 For the Kids! Event:

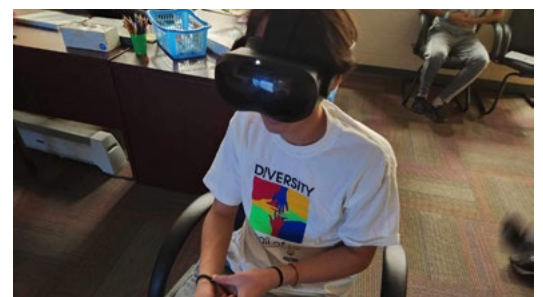
- Jerry Gamble teens are passionate about issues that include homelessness, food scarcity, and lack of resources for kids in lower-income neighborhoods.
- East Side teens are focusing on self-love and self-care as it pertains to mental wellness.
- Southside Village teens are researching the reasons behind homelessness of families and kids.
- Little Earth teens are working on a mental health/mental wellness documentary to foster dialogue and discussion with other teens in the community.
- West Side teens are working together to address food insecurity in their community.

New Technology in BGCTC's Life & Workforce Programming!

HELPING TEENS IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CAREER PATHS

PATHWAY2CAREERS is a career-connected learning tool that integrates skills and interest assessments, a labor market navigator, and applied math curriculum empowering Club teens to make informed decisions on career paths they wish to explore while developing the skills needed to succeed.

Transfr VR provides hands-on simulation training through Virtual Reality that provides an immersive learning environment that gives youth real-world experience in the skills they need for well-paying jobs. Careers teens can explore include healthcare, aviation, engineering, and construction.



Corporate Activations



HANDY PAINT PRODUCTS

Mark Bergman and Jeff Given of Handy Paint Products welcomed entrepreneur-minded teens from East Side and Jerry Gamble to their headquarters in September. Mark shared the story of growing his creation from a coffee-can prototype to a brand that is recognized nationally at Home Depot, Lowes, and other major paint and home improvement stores. The teens were able to learn lessons and ask questions about the process of starting a business.



MINNESOTA VIKINGS

Teens from the AI Lenzmeier West Side Club's A Westside Story podcast were invited to TCO performance center for a behind-the-scenes tour of the Minnesota Vikings television, radio, and podcast studios. The teens were able to meet with MN Vikings commentator, Pete Bercich, and the Voice of the Vikings and KFAN radio personality, Paul Allen. Paul Allen shared his story of becoming the preeminent play-by-play caller in the NFL and coached each of the teens through creating their own signature touchdown call. In addition to securing Paul Allen as a future guest on their podcast, the West Side teens also received Microsoft Surfaces from the Minnesota Vikings.

Alumni Spotlight: Mai Tong Yang

What have you been up to since graduating from high school?

After high school, I spent four wonderful years at the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University. It was there where I developed life-long friends and discovered I really enjoyed writing. After college graduation, I received a Fulbright grant to South Korea where I taught English for three years. During the third year in South Korea, I wanted to be closer to family and moved back to Minnesota where I began working for a U.S. Senator. Currently, I am a law student at the University of St. Thomas School of Law and will be graduating in May 2024.

How did your Club experience prepare you for your post-secondary pursuits?

The Boys & Girls Club taught me the power of confidence. I had mentors at the Club who told me they believed in me and that made all the difference in how I showed up for myself and others. Now, as a 3L law student who has gone through the same courses as current 1L law students, I serve as a mentor to them and discuss different study strategies. Post-secondary education can be very challenging when you are the first in your family to pursue it, but you are not alone. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

How did the skills you gained at the Club assist you in navigating the challenges you've encountered?

I participated in so many Club programs from Money Matters to Keystone—the Clubs may have renamed a couple of these programs but I believe the essence remains the same. The skills I learned at the Club prepared me to think critically and solve problems using resources I have readily available. Sometimes I might not have the resource, and the Club has taught me to look to my community to see who might be able to assist. This gives community members the opportunity to shine while helping the Club out!

What advice would you give to current Club members to maximize their Club experience?

Two things:

1. When a leadership opportunity arises at the Club and you feel like you are not qualified or ready, say yes anyway. For example, planning and leading a Keystone community event at the Club. You have staff and Club members to help you along the way and this gives you a chance to learn more about yourself and your community.
2. Try participating in a Club program that you have never done before. As a Club kid, I tried out jazz dancing and it was incredibly fun! Ultimately, I did not pursue it as a hobby or career, but I knew I wouldn't have the chance to do it elsewhere because my family couldn't afford it.



BGCTC Staff in the Community

Heartfelt gratitude and congratulations to our BGCTC staff for the following community recognition:

Mark Graves, Branch Director of the Southside Village Club, has been named the 2023 Minnesota Vikings Inspire Change Changemaker, recognizing his commitment to a life of service and the betterment of his beloved South Minneapolis community. Mark joined BGCTC in 1990 as the Director of Social Development and Teen Programming. Mark quickly established himself as a trusted mentor to youth and tireless advocate for families as he became a prominent leader within the Boys & Girls Clubs and the city of Minneapolis. Mark's "Southside Pride" and passion for elevating the positive and good in his community has led him to champion the Back in the Day Festival every year at the Southside Village Club. The festival gathers the South Minneapolis community to bond and celebrate the culture, unity, and vitality of the people and neighborhoods that embody the strength of South Minneapolis.



Congratulations, Mark, you are a true Changemaker!

Koreena Moua, Branch Director of the Eastside Club, is the recipient of a 2023 Watershed Excellence Award: Community Leadership award from the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District! Koreena has partnered with RWMWD to develop teen initiatives that instill a deep appreciation for wetlands. Project at the East Side Club include creating a rain garden, a permeable-pavers parking lot, neighborhood clean-ups, and youth art sculptures.



Congratulations, Koreena!

“Coach” John Bryant, Program Director at the Jerry Gamble Club, is the 2023 recipient of an esteemed award from Foot Locker – recognizing community champions for their dedication to service and youth development work. Coach JB has served North Side families for nearly 35 years, and we couldn't be prouder that he is part of the BGCTC family!



Congratulations, Coach JB!

Get Involved with the Clubs!

Volunteer

boysandgirls.org/get-involved/volunteers

- 1 Committed volunteers help magnify the impact of the Clubs.

Become a Corporate Partner

boysandgirls.org/corporate-partnerships

- 2 Corporate partners help advance the BGCTC mission and provide ongoing support.

Make a Recurring Gift

boysandgirls.org/give

- 3 A recurring monthly donation, no matter the amount, is a powerful investment in the next generation.

Join the Team

boysandgirls.org/get-involved/careers

- 4 Make a difference by helping youth reach their full potential.

SAVE THE DATE



February 19, 2024

Jerry Gamble Boys & Girls Club

[Learn More](#)



April 26, 2024

The Depot Minneapolis

[Learn More](#)



May 2024

Renaissance Learning Bloomington

[Learn More](#)



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