

Youth leaders bring civic engagement tour to Woodland



The book reading is just one stop on the Freedom Center's "To Us, You Matter Civic Engagement Tour," where youth leaders are spending the summer engaging with communities and developing their leadership skills. COURTESY

By [STAFF REPORTS](#) |

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The Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center recently hosted a community book reading at Cesar Chavez Community School in Woodland, as part of its 40-city civic engagement tour. The book reading was led by 30 youth leaders from the Oakland-based nonprofit.

At the event — held July 22 — youth leaders read excerpts from the book, "From a Kitchen in the World House." The book started as a project carried out during last year's shelter-in-place. The youth participated in a recipe exchange and prepared a traditional dish from another student's culture.

The book reading is just one stop on the Freedom Center's "To Us, You Matter Civic Engagement Tour," where youth leaders are spending the summer engaging with

communities and developing their leadership skills in over 40 communities and across three states. This year marks the first time the nonprofit has included Yolo County as one of its selected stops.

Along the tour, the youth delegation is meeting with local elected officials and community leaders. In Yolo County, the group met with County Assessor/Clerk-Recorder/Elections Official Jesse Salinas and County Superintendent Garth Lewis. Youth leaders have also met with Congressman Ro Khanna, State Assemblymember Alex Lee, and San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo.

The delegation is currently in the fourth week of its planned six-week tour. After leaving Yolo County, the delegation will travel to Sacramento and then north to Kent and Tacoma, Washington.

Finn Manohchonpoo, a high school senior from Washington state and one of the youth leaders who spoke during the book reading, said, "A lot of youth will say their voices don't matter and we are actively trying to challenge that." She adds that youth leaders are trying to build networks of connectivity around civic engagement.

Dr. Roy Wilson, director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, says the center's aim is for the students to change the world one step at a time, beginning with their own community. Wilson said, "Our first goal is for the students to go back to their schools and become leaders and go back to their homes and make their parents proud."

Wilson shared the nonprofit is looking to expand its youth programs into ten additional counties. He added that Yolo County is one of the counties being considered for the program expansion. The Freedom Center is currently in discussions with the Yolo County Office of Education.

In 2017, the Yolo County Office of Education, along with other partners, launched the Yolo County Youth Civic Initiative to improve civic education in Yolo County. In 2020, the initiative received a grant from the James B. McClatchy Foundation to expand its work.

For more information on the Yolo County Office of Education, visit www.ycoe.org. For more information on the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, visit mlkfreedomcenter.org.