

Dear Friend,

Young people know. They know what they are facing. **They are experts of their own experience.**

We know that you understand this because it's what compelled you to connect to Critical Exposure in the first place. We're going to ask you for your financial support, and I'd like to share a story about how that support will make a difference.

On November 1st, we hosted [Zoom In with Your Body] where Karri, a Critical Exposure Fellow, recalled a shocking moment while attending "March For Our Lives," a national youth-led march for tighter gun control. The moment was when she saw a 10-year-old as one of the march's main speakers:

It was strange to hear her say so many wise things because youth usually aren't given that option...to have grown-up conversations. The whole time [at the march], it was only people under 18 talking, which makes sense. Why would you have people who aren't in schools talking about school shootings?

Karri named the bias that youth face, even when they are fighting for their rights and their lives. **It's the bias of adulthood.**

Adulthood is the unjust treatment or control of youth, based on the belief that adults have more substance and value to add and are therefore entitled to act upon young people without their input or their consent.

Adulthood is considered normal and acceptable in our culture. But we need a culture shift. **We need a new normal.**

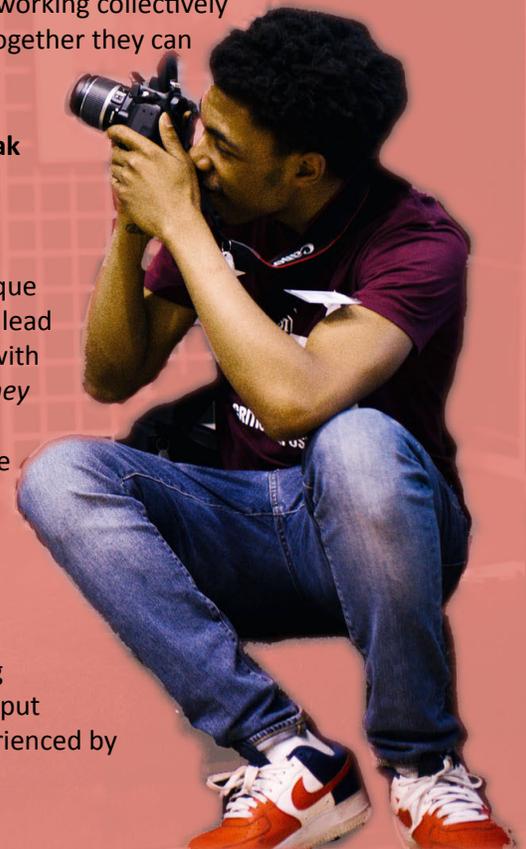
At Critical Exposure, DC youth of color use photography to fight for educational equity and social justice. Through their photography, they tell their stories, they shift the mainstream narrative, and they bring attention to the issues that most impact them in the school system.

This past year, we worked with 136 young people through our four programs, four partner schools, and a special partnership. This means that since our founding in 2004, **Critical Exposure has worked with more than 2,500 Black and Latinx youth.**

These young people tell us that because of Critical Exposure, they feel confident working collectively to gather support for the changes they are seeking and believe that by working together they can change school and communities.

Yet, even as we work to build youth capacities, **we must also do the work to break down adult bias.** Here's how Critical Exposure has done both this past year:

- **We co-hosted our first Youth Mayoral Forum** in partnership with Mikva Challenge DC and DC Alliance of Youth Advocates. Critical Exposure's unique role was to bring our expertise in training a collective of young people to lead and make decisions. As adult allies, our goal was to work in partnership with the youth leadership team, providing the resources and skills *they said they needed* to feel confident raising the issues they care about with mayoral candidates. At the end of the day, we got to be part of shaping a city-wide experience in local politics for more than 100 DC youth of color.
- **We worked with our partner schools to see young people as resources and experts.** For example, after a schedule change at one of our partner schools negatively impacted students who provide sibling care, we supported youth to lead a conversation with school staff to gather information about how and why decisions were made without consulting students. As a result, staff gained a new understanding of how student input *before* a decision could have prevented the negative consequences experienced by



students and parents. We are now working with that partner school to create a youth body that has influence over school culture and policy, so students have a voice in the conversations that result in policy changes. The school is learning what we already know: young people can understand school issues and contribute a perspective that makes decision-making more effective.

- **We increased opportunities for DC young people in our organizational leadership and decision-making.** By hiring emerging youth leaders as part-time and full-time staff members, particularly those who have been in our programs, DC young people are planning, facilitating, and influencing our school and citywide work. We now have five former youth leaders on staff! By involving youth in our hiring process and decisions for adult staff positions, Critical Exposure's team benefits at every level from their leadership and perspective.

As Karri also said, "In a time when youth are having to deal with a lot but are expected to stay silent about it, Critical Exposure's role is to help us take back our voice by giving us opportunities to exercise our rights and teaching us how to organize."

Critical Exposure is doing that work. We're practicing what we're asking others to practice. We listen to young people, and we're helping schools and the community to listen, too. We invite you to invest in this work. Help us create a new normal.

Will you make a donation today to advance Critical Exposure's work in 2019 to provide the space, training, and resources for youth of color to lead us to more just and equitable schools?

Our friends at Mayer Brown are matching the first \$10,000 raised now through December 31st. **This means that your first financial gift to Critical Exposure will have double the impact!**

This kind of culture shift takes time and intentionality. Change doesn't happen neatly in an academic year. But each year, young people call us closer to a vision for supportive schools and communities where adults believe their words, their experiences, and their leadership.

Your gift today makes a new normal possible where DC youth of color like Karri are cultivated and listened to as leaders **right now**.

With gratitude,



Felicia A. Ramos

Acting Executive Director

P.S. Giving is easy! Use the enclosed envelope or donate securely at criticalexposure.org/donate. And if you donate \$250 or more **or** become a monthly donor at least \$25/month, we'll send you our 2019 Critical Exposure calendar!