

Left to right, Rudolfo Reyes; Alex Schneider;  
Tyler Bacon and Yorri Berry.

## NeighborWorks® Youth Awards Honor Four Young Leaders

NeighborWorks® America has announced the Innovations in Community Development Youth Awards, honoring four young citizens from across the country who have dedicated their time, energy, and unique talents to improving their communities.

The awards were presented in four leadership categories – academic setting, team building and collaborations, policy and advocacy, and environmental efforts and disaster rebuild. Each includes a plaque and a cash stipend.

The four winners were Rudolfo Reyes of Houston, academic setting; Alex Schneider of Boise, Idaho, team building and collaborations; Tyler Bacon of Jacksonville, Florida, policy and advocacy; and Yorri Berry of New Orleans, environmental efforts and disaster rebuild.

The awards were presented in February at a NeighborWorks® symposium, “Youth Matters: New Voices Energizing Community Development,” in Atlanta ([www.nw.org/youth](http://www.nw.org/youth)).

**Academic Setting:** Rudolfo Reyes is a senior at Jefferson Davis High School in Houston. For the past two years, he has been the student representative on a six-member Sharing Decision Making Committee, which also included the principal and a parent from Jefferson Davis, a business representative, the police department’s community liaison, and the Northside Weed and Seed liaison.

Working with the committee, Reyes has organized many community events, including a recent food drive. He debriefs and gets feedback from various groups at the high school on SDMC meetings, and then recruits students to participate in community improvement events, such as the food drive.

One of the committee’s newest projects is to establish a juvenile court at the neighborhood library. Parents have not been able to attend downtown court dates, because they work long hours and do not have cars. An area court would make attendance easier.

With Reyes’s input, the SDMC is able to understand the complex issues facing the neighborhood, to inform youth about community programs and issues, and to have a high rate of student participation in community programs and events.



**Team Building and Collaborations:** Alex Schneider is an eighth grader at Riverglen Junior High in Boise, Idaho, who also was among a group of 10 youth chosen by the governor to meet the Dali Lama. He assists with children’s activities at NHS Inc. of Boise’s transitional housing program for homeless families with children, Homeward Bound. When he realized that program families did not have computers, he set out to get them.

So far, he has obtained 15 computers with current operating systems, and is working with local businesses to get software. He is preparing a curriculum to help the kids learn computer skills, and has permission from his teacher to use his school’s computer lab for training, if necessary. He plans to conduct the classes himself, with supervision, because he feels the kids will learn better from someone their own age.

Schneider also is including kids in NHS’s multifamily communities. Two computers will be placed in each multifamily community room, and seven will be given to Homeward Bound families. He plans to encourage his students to teach their computer skills to their parents, too – as a way to help break the cycle of poverty.

**Policy and Advocacy:** Tyler Bacon of Jacksonville, Florida, has focused on improving the foster care system. He entered the system as a 13-year-old and has been advocating for changes since he was 17. He has served on several youth and adult boards, working for improvement of the system.

As a participant in a youth leadership training with Volunteer Jacksonville, he shared his experience about being in the foster care system, and the group chose as its project to remodel a group home for younger kids who first enter the system. They repainted the walls, and fixed and repainted the playground set. They bought new furniture and put it together. They also did the lawn, and made the home safer and more welcoming.

He currently sits on the National Foster Youth Advisory Council, which advocates change and awareness of the system in the United States. He was recently voted its vice president. He also sits on a

committee that is working on developing a national peer-mentoring program for foster youth.

**Environmental Efforts and Disaster Rebuild:** Yorri Berry is a hurricane-displaced Loyola University senior attending Spelman College in Atlanta. She walked into a new city and a new school and remained committed to encouraging collegians to serve others, as she personally demonstrated.

Berry's top priorities were to stay on-track for graduation and to continue dedicating her efforts to serving whatever community surrounded her. She was heavily active on campus, helping other students become aware of the political, economic, and health issues surrounding the hurricane. She was voted into the Spelman Student Government Association Advisory Board, where she became the university's Hurricane Relief Coordinator.

She volunteered at the Hosea Williams Foundation and participated in numerous meetings on how the three schools in the Atlanta University Center could come together to help those affected by the disaster. She spoke to hundreds of students as the main speaker at an NPHC-sponsored Hurricane Awareness forum designed to raise awareness of the disaster and funds for the victims.

## Anti-Foreclosure Partnership to Draw on Chicago Model

by William Caplan

Organizations across the country have been rising to the challenge of rising home mortgage foreclosure rates. Now, two leading organizations – NeighborWorks® America and the Homeownership Preservation Foundation (HPF) of Minneapolis, are teaming up to leverage their efforts in reaching homeowners as early as possible to prevent foreclosure.

The partnership essentially will link HPF's toll-free hotline (888) 995-HOPE, which offers free foreclosure prevention counseling and advice, with NeighborWorks® America's national network of organizations that provide homeownership education and counseling.

Under the partnership, HPF will provide an initial 12-month grant to support a nationwide campaign to educate U.S. homeowners. NeighborWorks® America will deploy this funding in a number of ways:

- ▶ Development and implementation of foreclosure prevention workshops targeting community development practitioners in communities served by NeighborWorks® organizations. These educational sessions will be created by the NeighborWorks® Center for Homeownership Education and Counseling, the nation's largest training and certifier of homeownership counselors.

- ▶ Support of face-to-face counseling for at-risk homeowners, provided by NeighborWorks® organizations serving more than 4,400 urban, suburban and rural communities across the country.

- ▶ Creation of a nationwide public service campaign to encourage homeowners to call (888) 995-HOPE to receive counseling.

The two nonprofits will also work together to implement foreclosure prevention research, and to conduct high-level industry forums on the topic.

In their efforts to combat foreclosure, NeighborWorks® organizations will draw from a pilot program implemented by Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, a NeighborWorks® organization, and the NeighborWorks® Center for Foreclosure Solutions ([www.nw.org/foreclosuresolutions](http://www.nw.org/foreclosuresolutions)).

First, borrowers will be "triaged" to determine the type and extent of their problems. Then, solutions appropriate to each individual case will be offered, including education, telephone and face-to-face counseling, mediation between the borrower and the financial institution, bridge loans, and rehab loans. The overriding goal will be to reach homeowners as early as possible, because the earlier problems are faced, the more options a homeowner has and the greater the opportunity for successful resolution.

At the end of 12 months, HPF will work with NeighborWorks® America to evaluate the program. Based on its success, HPF may contribute an additional \$850,000 to continue the efforts of the partnership for an additional 24 months.

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