

JUST ME for JUST US

2024 Impact Report



In rural Maine, where innovation and collaboration have always thrived, we are building something powerful: a movement led by young people who care deeply for their communities and our collective future. At JustME for JustUS (JMJU), we believe that the voices of rural youth hold the key to long-term resilience. In 2024, their leadership has brought us closer to a vision where no one is left out of the conversation about embracing and protecting the places we call home.

What makes JMJU unique? Rural communities face distinct challenges, including systemic barriers to civic participation that have left many areas classified as "civic deserts." JMJU exists to bridge these divides. By working in **politically polarized hotspots** and fostering connections in regions like Washington, Hancock, Penobscot, Franklin, and Kennebec counties, we center relationships, trust, and shared values to empower youth to lead locally-driven solutions that resonate with their communities. Through listening to those most often excluded, supporting their leadership, and facilitating dialogue across divides, **JMJU is building bridges, connecting diverse perspectives, and fostering collaborative action to create a more inclusive and engaged civic landscape.**

This year, we expanded professional development opportunities for our Rural Youth Organizers (RYOs), connected them with experts across Maine, and equipped them with resources to develop impactful, locally led projects. Given that 2024 was an election year, **we focused on empowering youth voices at the ballot box by reaching out to every young person registered in our target counties to discuss their voting plans.** We also organized candidate accountability forums and voter registration drives, ensuring young people had the tools and opportunities to make their voices heard.



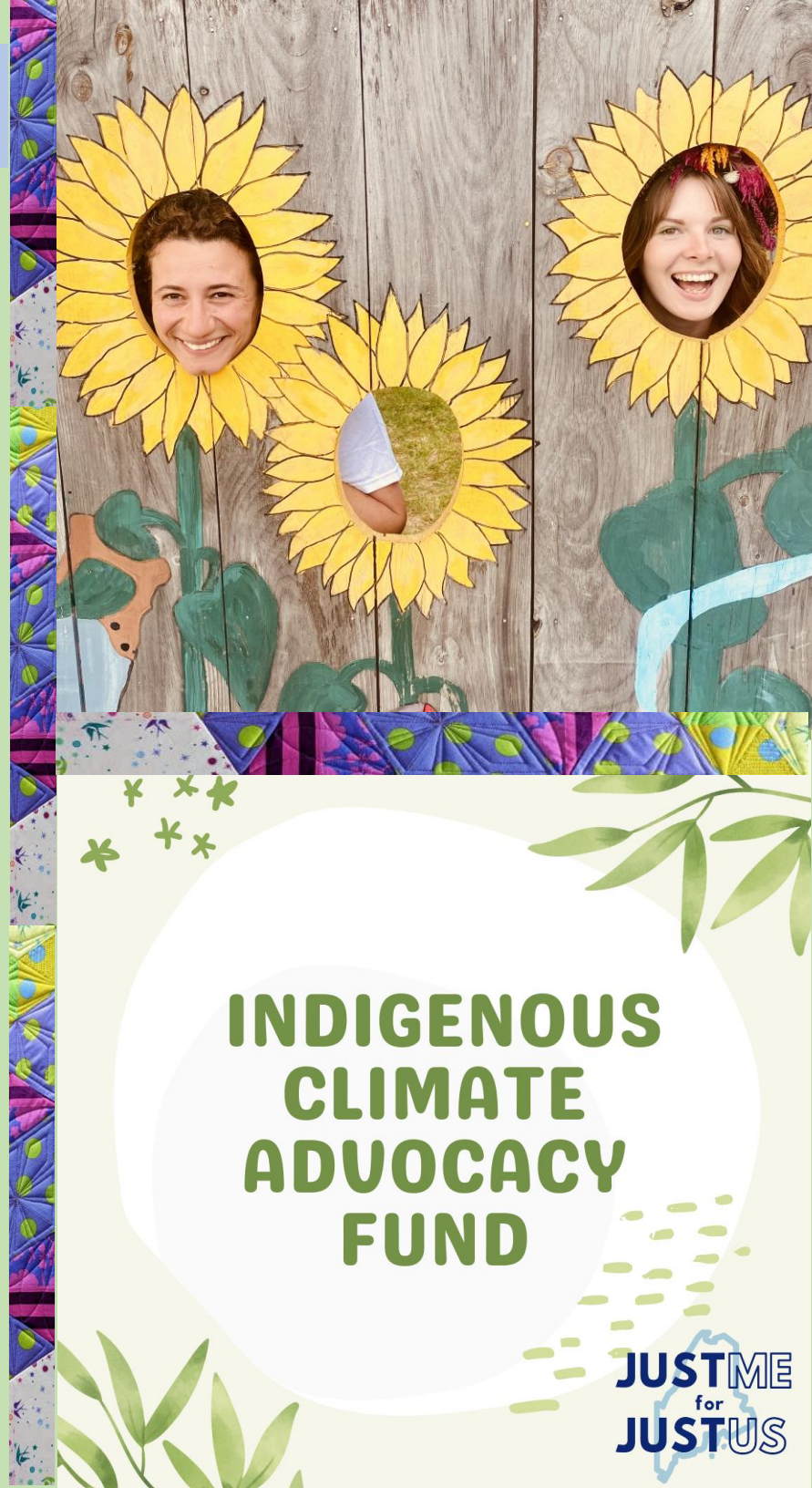
We remain committed to equity, collaboration, and accountability. JMJU's partnerships with organizations like Maine Youth for Climate Justice, the Wabanaki Alliance, and the League of Women Voters allow us to amplify our impact and learn from those doing critical work across the state.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are proving that rural youth are not only capable of leading the charge for positive change - but that they are already doing it.

With gratitude,
Laura Bither

2024: The Highlights

- Received our 501c3 status!
- Elected our Board of Directors, **composed of two-thirds youth members**
- Worked with 19 Rural Youth Organizers (RYOs) throughout the year
- Reached over 1,100 youth through events, workshops, and training
- **Texted roughly 10,000 young people (ages 15-29) in our target counties, held over 1,000 conversations throughout the election season, and secured over 60 voter pledges!**
- Provided stipends to 70 volunteer youth organizers
- Presented as a “Community Spotlight” at GrowSmart Maine’s Annual Summit in Waterville, Maine
- Helped organize the annual Youth Day of Action at the State House, with 170+ young people in attendance
- **Led 45 impactful projects, such as climate justice workshops and voter engagement initiatives**
- Co-hosted four nonpartisan candidate forums for local races, including one co-moderated by a JMJU RYO
- Launched our Indigenous Climate Advocacy Fund, **an initiative to provide professional development opportunities and support to Indigenous and non-Indigenous allied youth living in rural Maine.**



Franklin County Highlights

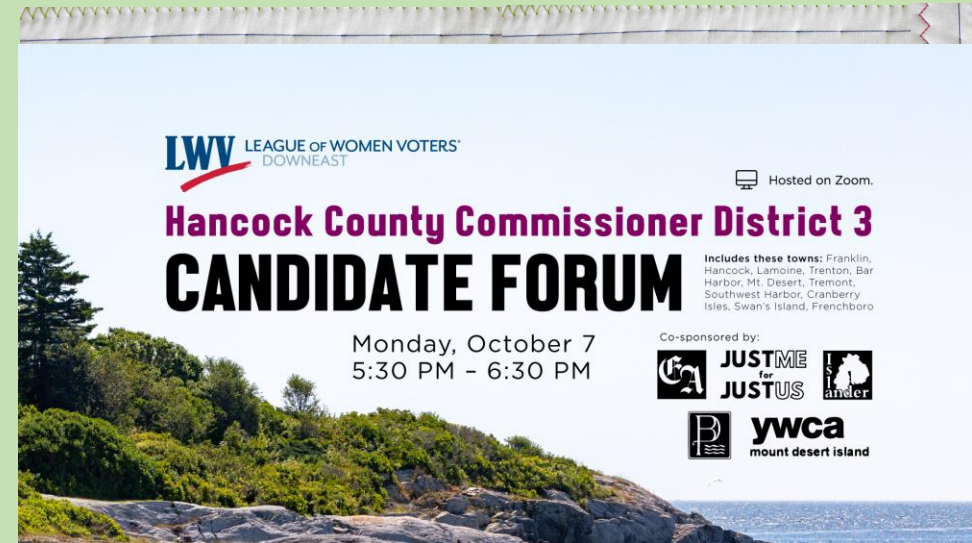


Local Food Matters vision board event, hosted by Franklin County RYO Isabelle

- **Exploring Maine's Food Systems:** A compelling interview series capturing the voices of local farmers, educators, and students, highlighting their roles within Maine's food ecosystem.
- **Unveiling Climate Realities:** A deep dive into the lived experiences of youth in rural and tourist towns through impactful surveys and interviews, uncovering the personal and community-level impacts of climate change.
- **Storytelling Through Film:** A visually engaging 40-minute video, thoughtfully compiled from spring interviews, to spark community dialogue and action.
- **Mobilizing Voices for Change:** Dynamic text and phone banking efforts, amplifying youth voices and fostering engagement during a pivotal election season.

Hancock County Highlights

- **Youth Mental Health and Climate Change:** A thought-provoking event exploring the intersection of mental health and the climate crisis, focusing on the unique challenges faced by youth in coastal communities.
- **Coastal Climate Realities Survey:** A deep dive into how climate change is impacting Coastal Hancock County, gathering local perspectives to inform future action.
- **Turning Trash into Treasure:** A creative "Crafting from Cleanup" project engaging 10 youth in transforming collected waste into art, highlighting sustainability through innovation.
- **Youth Engagement in Action:** Interactive presentations in collaboration with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, inspiring young leaders to tackle climate challenges in their communities.
- **Designing the Future:** a daylong event in partnership with Healthy Acadia, Deer Isle/Stonington High School, Haystack Arts, and others with local high schoolers to reimagine and redesign a causeway connecting the working waterfront community on the island to the mainland that had been destroyed by strong winter storms in January 2024.



LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®]
DOWNEAST

Hosted on Zoom.

Hancock County Commissioner District 3 CANDIDATE FORUM

Includes these towns: Franklin, Hancock, Lamoine, Trenton, Bar Harbor, Mt. Desert, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Cranberry Isles, Swan's Island, Frenchboro

Monday, October 7
5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

Co-sponsored by:

JUSTME for JUSTUS
ywca mount desert island



TEXT BANKING PARTY!

with your local JustME for JustUS Rural Youth Organizers!

For more information
blighalison@gmail.com
mfujiwara26@coa.edu

Register here!

Food will be provided

Stipends are available for participation!

12pm Saturday November 2nd
Jesup Library



SLOWING DOWN FOR DEEP CHANGE IN A FAST-PACED CULTURE

A reflection on youth organizing in coastal Maine with Latin American influence

Essay by Isidora L. Muñoz

Kennebec County Highlights



Jewelry & Justice event, hosted by RYO's Tessa and Rashmi

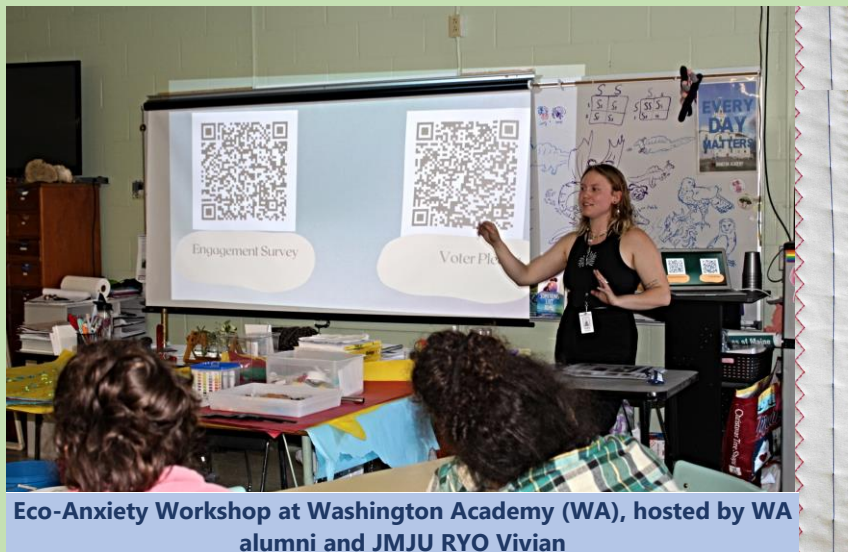
- **Unearthing the Past - Climate History Presentation:** A captivating event engaging 15 youth, exploring the historical context of climate change and its implications for the future.
- **Jewelry & Justice:** Two inspiring events blending art and activism, where youth created sustainable jewelry while discussing environmental justice.
- **Voices of Change:** A series of in-depth interviews with 35 youth, capturing their perspectives on environmental change and their visions for a sustainable future.
- **Youth Action in Government Workshop:** A dynamic summer session with 6 participants, empowering young leaders to understand and influence government systems to drive climate action.
- **Youth Power at the Polls:** A robust voter engagement initiative, including text and phone banking efforts that connected youth with critical resources to amplify their voices during election season.



Washington County Highlights



- **Eco-Anxiety Talks:** A series of discussions helping youth process and navigate the emotional impact of climate change while fostering resilience and hope.
- **Action in the Community:** Youth-led efforts to restore local beaches, combining environmental stewardship with hands-on action.
- **Downeast Pride Canvassing:** Youth engaged in civic outreach during Downeast Pride, advocating for climate justice and community solidarity.
- **Workshops and Projects for Change:** Over 10 projects and events, including leadership camp workshops and community initiatives, empowered youth to take ownership of climate solutions.
- **Youth Democracy in Action:** Vote-centered initiatives, including text and phone banking, encouraged young voters to participate in elections and advocate for policies that reflect their values.



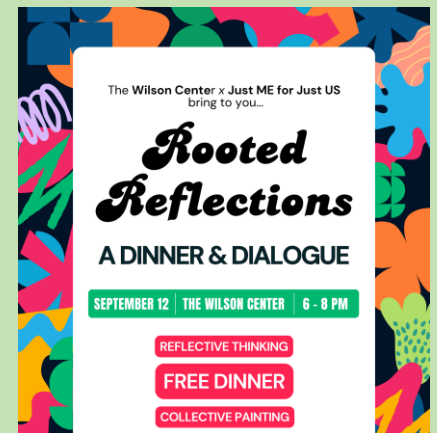
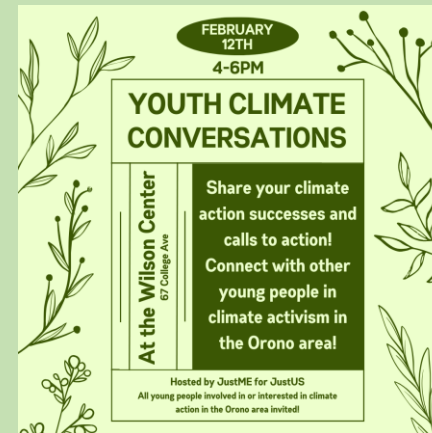
Eco-Anxiety Workshop at Washington Academy (WA), hosted by WA alumni and JMJU RYO Vivian

Penobscot County Highlights

- **Shaping Our Future - Climate Community Visioning Conversation:** In collaboration with local environmental groups, this event engaged 15 youth (5 in-person and 9+ via email), fostering bold ideas and shared goals for a sustainable community.
- **Fighting Voter Apathy Workshop:** A hands-on spring workshop in collaboration with the League of Women Voter's that provided youth with tools to combat voter apathy and inspire civic participation.
- **Grow Together:** Planting native plants, reflecting on individual relationship with the land, and having conversations on decolonization at Central High School.
- **Civic Voices - Interviews and Surveys:** Over the summer, 17 youth delved into civic engagement, conducting interviews and surveys to understand and amplify community needs.
- **Rooted Reflections, A Dinner and Dialogue:** An event series with 2 evenings of reflection, collective artmaking, and sharing food as 75+ total participants explored their relationship with the land.



Climate Community Visioning Conversation hosted by RYO Louise



Thank You to Our Funders

We're so proud to recognize our funders, whose unwavering commitment to our mission has been instrumental in making our success happen. The initiatives, programs, and advocacy efforts that resonate across rural Maine were made possible by generous investments by foundations, organizations, and individual donors. Your contributions - whether helping us expand into new counties, launch impactful community-based programs, or hire our dedicated cohort of Rural Youth Organizers - have been the backbone of our progress. Your belief in our work and your individual generosity drive everything we accomplish.

Thank you!

Elmina B. Sewall
FOUNDATION

Unitarian Universalist
Funding Program



Nara Fund



Our individual
donors!



This past year, we're thrilled to share that we ***doubled our individual donors from the previous year***, a testament to the growing community of supporters who believe in rural youth-led change. In 2025, we plan to double that number again.

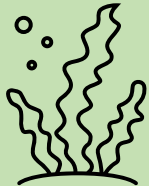
Our Impact, From Our Rural Youth Organizers

"In rural Maine, I've learned that relationships are the foundation of organizing. **These connections – with stakeholders, fellow organizers, youth, and community members – make everything possible.**"



"As an RYO, I **have access to professional development opportunities, and a community of people working in the environmental justice space throughout all of Maine**, which has expanded my awareness of other organizations and nonprofits doing amazing work."

"**Having the freedom of creating and facilitating projects that I know will best serve my community** has helped me connect with others through insightful conversations that are needed to change ourselves and the world for the better."



"Becoming an organizer at JMJU has been one of the most impactful decisions I've made – not because of what I've accomplished alone, but because of what we've built together: **a community of young people in rural Maine who understand their power to shape the future of their communities.**"

"I am immensely grateful for the impact JMJU has had on my life and early career, and **I look forward to continuing to work alongside them to build a brighter future for Maine and beyond.**"



Looking Ahead: Our 2025 Vision

As we reflect on the progress we've made together, we're excited to share our ambitious goals for 2025. With your continued support, we aim to expand our reach and deepen our impact across rural Maine:

- **Engage 1,000 youth** in JMJU workshops, conversations, and trainings to build a powerful movement for change.
- **Provide stipends to 150 youth** for their time and leadership in organizing, ensuring their efforts are valued and compensated.
- Support **40 Rural Youth Organizer-led projects**, including workshops, events, and trainings that drive community transformation.
- **Host 5 conversations** focused on depolarizing climate issues and uniting young people across political divides.
- **Expand our presence northward** in 2025, working in 9 rural Maine focus counties: Washington, Penobscot, Hancock, Franklin, Oxford, Kennebec, Somerset, Piscataquis, and Aroostook.
- **Deliver impactful presentations**, showcasing rural youth success stories and inspiring stakeholders to invest in climate justice initiatives.

We need your help to make 2025 a year of record-breaking impact. Our goal is to raise \$50,000 from supporters like you by May 1, 2025. Will you join us in investing in the future of rural Maine's youth?

Together, we can ensure that rural voices are heard and that young leaders have the resources they need to create lasting change. To donate today, please visit our fundraising page: [Donate to JustME for JustUS](#).

Thank You to Our Team



Louise
RYO | Penobscot



Isabelle
RYO | Franklin



Jessie
RYO | Hancock



Emmett
RYO | Franklin



Isi
RYO | Hancock



Roz
RYO | Penobscot



Tessa
RYO | Kennebec



Rashmi
RYO | Kennebec



Eric
RYO | Franklin



Alison
RYO | Hancock



Mils
RYO | Kennebec



Artemis
RYO | Washington



Ace
RYO | Washington



India
RYO | Kennebec



Vivian
RYO | Washington



Kai
RYO | Washington



Mizuki
RYO | Hancock



Sam
RYO | Kennebec



Bella
RYO | Kennebec



Laura
Director



Larissa
Development Advisor



Chloe
Advisor/Co-Founder

Thank You to Our Board of Directors



Edge Venuti

Board Chair
*Student at the University of Maine
and a former Rural Youth
Organizer*



Red Fong

Treasurer
*Systems-change organizer,
skilled facilitator,
and seamstress*



Ella Tabasky

Secretary
*Dedicated environmental
advocate, activist, and
experienced event planner*