

# YOUR ATTITUDE DETERMINES YOUR ALTITUDE

## 2022 Texas Youth Advisory Commission Summit

By Yalondra M. Valderrama-Santana, Recreation Coordinator, City of Killeen



The 2022 Texas Youth Advisory Commission (YAC) Summit was hosted by the Killeen YAC on February 5-6 at the Killeen Civic and Conference Center. The YAC Summit is a two-day statewide event hosted by a different Texas city each year and sponsored by the Texas Municipal League (TML). This event provides Texas youth groups the opportunity to attend a youth-lead Summit and participate in leadership training, networking, teambuilding, and more.

The Killeen YAC was the first youth advisory commission created in Texas. It was founded in 1993 by Killeen Mayor Raúl Villaronga and originally had 11 commissioner positions. This year, the Killeen YAC has 37 commissioner positions available as well as an unlimited number of resource member positions and unlimited number of Junior YAC members. This program is available for Killeen residents and

Killeen Independent School District students from grades 4 through 12.

The Killeen YAC's mission is to provide community youth with opportunities – through volunteerism and service – that are directed toward effective change. YAC members uphold the mission by creating events and activities that engage local youth. Some of the activities include teen talks, beautification projects, leadership development trainings, adaptive activities, community development, youth conference, and teambuilding exercises.

The 2022 YAC Summit's theme was "Your Attitude Determines Your Altitude." Killeen YAC members spent over a year planning this event to welcome more than 100 Texas teens from various youth councils, their adult liaisons,



and other city officials. Two days before the event, recreation services staff had to adjust the Summit schedule and timeline due to Winter Storm Landon. Killeen recreation services staff were determined to hold the Summit and not cancel. Staff reworked the timeline of the event, coordinated with presenters and guest speakers, and laid out a plan that they believed would still meet the Summit objective. Killeen staff and YAC members arrived at 5:00 a.m. on February 5 to set-up the main reception area, the classrooms, and ballroom. The team worked together and were ready to welcome attendees when they arrived later that morning

The Summit welcomed many influential leaders such as the author of *Thrive U* and former University of Missouri quarterback Alex Demczak and Sergeant First Class (retired) Dana Bowman from the United States Army's elite parachute team, the Golden Knights. The Summit goal was to encourage youth to keep working hard to achieve their dreams despite adversities.

The Killeen YAC planning committee wanted to create an out-of-this-world experience for attendees. To create this experience, each attendee was assigned to a team where they worked together to pass all of the Astronaut Training



Check Points. Each team collected stamps by participating in workshops and different activities. There was a total of five workshops: My Aliens, Krypto Kurrency, Mission Control, Rocket Science, and Interstellar. The My Aliens workshop focused on personal identity and how to see beyond stereotypes. The Krypto Kurrency workshop concentrated on how money works with a deep dive in three areas: rule of 72, credit and investing, and sample budgeting. The Mission Control workshop included how to create effective teambuilding activities to make teams stronger. The Rocket Science workshop focused on using personal resources and how to think outside the box to be successful. Finally, the Interstellar workshop discussed how to communicate with each other, have conversations with strangers, be persuasive, and use different communication techniques.

As part of the Summit, an evening social took place at the Altitude Trampoline Park for the attendees to mingle in a more relaxed setting. During the social event, the Killeen YAC scheduled teambuilding games such as dodgeball, bounce battles, and trampoline whispers.

The Summit was not just a great experience for the youth, but for the adult liaisons as well. The liaisons had their own workshop where they were able to discuss the challenges they were facing with their YAC programs. Some of the challenges mentioned were recruitment, engagement, communication, and financial resources. The group discussed strategies to increase recruitment numbers such as partnering with school districts, more social media engagement, and finding ways to better tell the YAC story to attract new members.

Engagement and communication go hand-in-hand. As the adult liaison, sometimes it can be difficult to connect with a variety of teens. Trying to keep up with pop-culture and areas of interest for today's teens is a key factor to communicate and engage with them. For each YAC, the financial aspect is different. Some YAC programs are funded by their cities, non-profits, and grants, while programs lacking funding rely on fundraising, sponsors, and donations. During the finance resourcing discussion, everyone learned about the various grants and programs that YACs can apply for and how to gain financial support from their governments and youth-oriented programs. This adult discussion gave attendees a better understanding of YACs from around the State.

This year's Summit was an unforgettable experience for both the Killeen YAC and attendees due to the life-long friendships made and lessons learned from one another.

The Killeen YAC and Killeen Recreation Services Department are grateful to all of the volunteers, staff, TML personnel, and everyone who helped to make the 2022 YAC Summit an unforgettable experience. In addition, Killeen wants to give a special thanks to the event sponsors for their contributions: Walmart, H-E-B, Chick-fil-A, University of North Texas, Cameron Park Zoo, In-N-Out Burger, Claire's, and Raising Cane's Chicken. ★