



## **Cool Kids, Cool Places, Cool Futures in Tempe**

**As part of the Cities Taking Action to Address Health, Equity, and Climate Change Initiative, Tempe was one of six U.S. cities that received support from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and C4O Cities to create transformative community-led projects.**

### **Health, equity and climate risks in Tempe**

Tempe, Arizona is a sprawling Phoenix suburb impacted by record-breaking heat and heat-related deaths. In 2023, Phoenix endured the [hottest month on record for any U.S. city](#): 31 days in a row at 43°C (110°F) or above. During this time, the temperature rarely dropped below 32°C (90°F).

As the climate crisis escalates and global temperatures continue to rise, extreme heat in the area is only expected to get worse. The number of days over 43°C (110°F) is projected to rise [to 42 days by 2030, and up to 63 days by 2050](#).

Extreme heat can be deadly. In 2021, at least [339](#) heat-related deaths were recorded in Maricopa County, where Phoenix is located. This figure is more than double that recorded in 2019.

### **What is Cool Kids, Cool Places, Cool Futures?**

In response to these dangerous temperatures, staff from the City of Tempe's Office of Sustainability and Resilience united with local high school students and teachers for a project centred on youth education, dialogue, and activism. With support from Arizona State University (ASU) and the Indigenous Design Collaborative, the team worked together to establish Cool Kids, Cool Places, Cool Futures, a project designed to introduce nature-based solutions to help cool the city.

Inspired by community-focused youth coalitions in Morocco and [New Zealand](#), the project's larger goal is to move heat resilience from individual responsibility to a community response.

## **What has Cool Kids, Cool Places, Cool Futures achieved so far?**

The City of Tempe worked with partners to design and implement training sessions for six Summer Youth Fellows from McClintock High School to empower young people to become thought leaders and activists.

ASU's Indigenous Design Collaborative, ASU professors and researchers, and equity consultants co-developed the youth training programme. The training covered the history of Tempe and Indigenous knowledge in city planning decisions, particularly against extreme heat. At the same time, it made space for the young people to express their vision for a more inclusive and resilient city as its future caretakers.

The history modules covered how the Native tribes indigenous to Tempe – including Salt-River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and Gila River Indian Community – were systematically oppressed by the Federal government. Various practices forced them to abandon their cultural traditions, physical appearance, language, spiritual practices and in some cases even separate children from the rest of their families. Some, like the San Pablo Barrio Community, were displaced from their centrally located neighbourhood to La Victoria, a rural, isolated, and disinvested neighbourhood.

The training highlighted the environmental injustice of the extreme heat in the neighbourhoods where Indigenous Peoples were displaced to, due to lack of tree canopy, green spaces, and access to nature. The young people engaged in facilitated dialogue to increase their awareness of the historical and present-day lived realities of Tempe residents and empower them to take action.

### **School gardens**

At one of the project's partnering schools, McClintock High School, the 25 students in the Sustainability Club established a greenhouse and garden on the school grounds. Recognising the importance of nature in heat mitigation, the club planted over 30 desert-adapted, native trees on the school grounds. Thanks to the Indigenous Design Collective, McClintock students are learning about indigenous growing and farming practices

and using this knowledge to build and grow a larger courtyard garden at the school.

Evelyn Brumfield, Youth Climate Action Coordinator with the City of Tempe, partnered with teachers and students at Connolly Elementary to plant 61 trees of different species that are either native or well-suited for Tempe's dry heat climate.

When touring the newly planted grounds, student Shalae Clemens who was soon leaving for college said, "I wish we had these when I was growing up. There used to be nowhere shaded and cool to sit for lunch. Now, these kids will have that."

Building on the success of this high-school engagement, the City of Tempe's Sustainability Office has established a formal agreement with the Tempe school district to deepen existing partnerships and form new ones with passionate students, teachers and schools across the city.

### **Beyond the school gates**

The young people engaged in this project didn't stop at the school boundaries. The City of Tempe partnered with McClintock students who designed a bioswale – a curved channel built to collect and transport stormwater runoff. The bioswale was established on city land facing one of the ASU's properties, and is now planted with native plants.

Extreme heat impacts are felt most by already vulnerable communities. The project's team members co-hosted an event during the Summer where they distributed 'Readi Pack' kits to unhoused people to help cope with the heat. The kits included a reusable water bottle, a cooling towel, sunblock, a collapsible bowl, wet wipes, and a transit pass in a reusable bag.

Youth Climate Action Coordinator Evelyn Brumfield said "the grant is over, but it's become a springboard for how our work will be done in the future."

Through the Cool Kids, Cool Places, Cool Futures project, the visionary leaders at City of Tempe's Sustainability Office, ASU, and Tempe school students and teachers have raised awareness about environmental justice, and empowered young people to be advocates and changemakers. Together, they have instituted initiatives at the city level to make Tempe a more equitable, green, and cool place to be.

This project team included the leadership and participation of the following people (in alphabetical order): Braden Kay (former Sustainability and Resilience Director, City of Tempe); Brianne Fisher (City of Tempe); Carlos Casanova (Arizona State University); Evelyn Brumfield (City of Tempe); Shalae Clemens (Climate Action Fellow); teachers and student leaders in McClintock High School, including Corey Ozan; Tempe High, including Stephanie Milam-Edwards and Aimee Quinn; Connolly Elementary; Principal Pugh; and teacher sponsors of AVID & NJrHS.

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