

Born to two Romanian immigrants, I learned the value of culture from a young age as I've watched the creation and growth of our community. However, I have noticed youth drifting away from the culture that helped shape my identity. By increasing education on Romanian culture and creating a sense of belonging through a youth council, the RCC can foster youth engagement to evolve into a vibrant community for all ages.

While there are language classes beginning in September that youth can get involved in, many may lack the knowledge of the history and culture of Romania. Without knowing the background of the country or even where traditions originated from, it may be difficult to feel involved or even understand why these traditions occur. By implementing a comprehensive cultural education program, youth can attend these events to learn more about Romanian history and traditions. Various events, such as storytelling nights, dance classes, or even a cooking night dedicated to youth, will ignite a passion for heritage while also teaching life skills. By achieving this, Romanian youth would better understand their roots, and feeling a sense of connection can promote involvement in the RCC. On June 1st, 2024, Children's Day was celebrated, and the turnout was extremely positive. Continuing events like these while implementing aspects of Romanian culture can get youth excited to come back to the RCC and to be involved.

Often, youth can feel as if they are not heard and are misunderstood. In our fast-paced world, they can feel disconnected from their culture and community. Young people need a place where they feel a sense of belonging. A youth council should be created to help bridge this gap by ensuring the youth feel they belong, their voice is heard, and ideas are valued. By implementing this, young people would mention ideas or different perspectives that may not have been considered by the executive board, which can further increase involvement. The unified community created as a result of this board will help lessen the division between generations. The young people on this council can meet once a month alongside the executive board to express their opinions and feedback on the different topics brought up, such as event planning or community outreach. By listening to youth voices, the center can stay updated and improve their outreach efforts. Giving the youth council a chance to create their own events can promote leadership, which would further increase involvement and help build valuable skills for themselves.

Fostering youth engagement at the RCC has multiple approaches, but emphasizing connection to the culture and a sense of belonging will help further increase their involvement. These opportunities will not only benefit the RCC as an organization but also gift the youth with enriching, lifelong skills and a deep connection to our cherished culture.