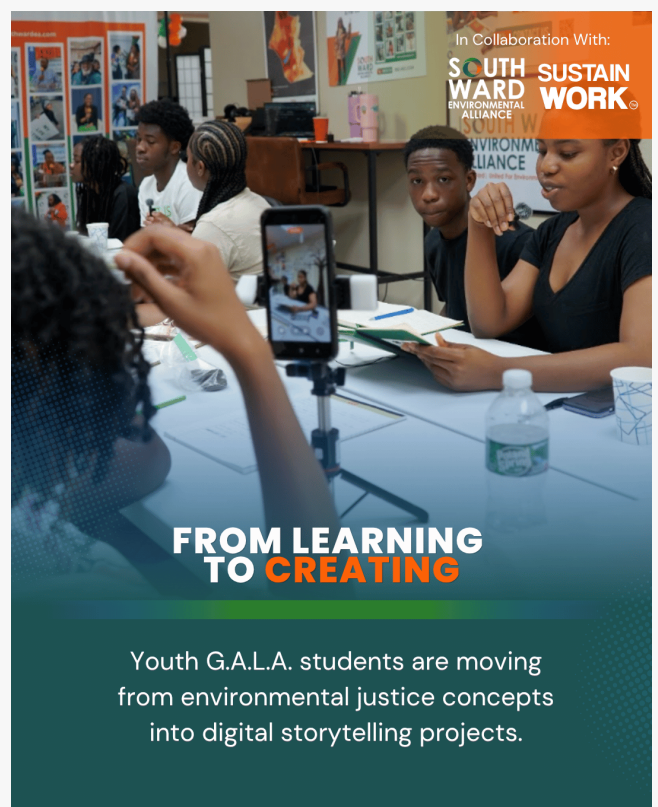


Newark High School Seniors Turn Environmental Justice Research Into Three Original Documentaries

15 students investigate air quality, shipping justice and tree canopy in their own neighborhoods, then made films. Public debut Aug. 22.

NEWARK, NJ, UNITED STATES, August 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Fifteen Newark high school seniors graduate today as Youth G.A.L.A. Fellows screened three original short documentaries they researched, filmed and edited themselves, examining the diesel emissions, consumerism as it related to shipping and missing tree canopy shaping daily life in their own neighborhoods.

Today's screening at the South Ward Environmental Alliance ([SWEA](#)) office, 1067 1/2 Bergen Street, is for families and program partners. The films debut publicly on Aug. 22 at the same location, during the second annual Black August Intergenerational Open Mic hosted by SWEA.



Students learn how to interview

The films, *Newark Stinks*, *The Life of a Box* and *A Life With No Trees*, run seven to 10 minutes each. They were produced through Youth G.A.L.A., the youth track of SWEA's Green Alliance Leadership Academy. Students worked in three production teams over six weeks and handled the research, source selection, interviews, filming and editorial decisions themselves.

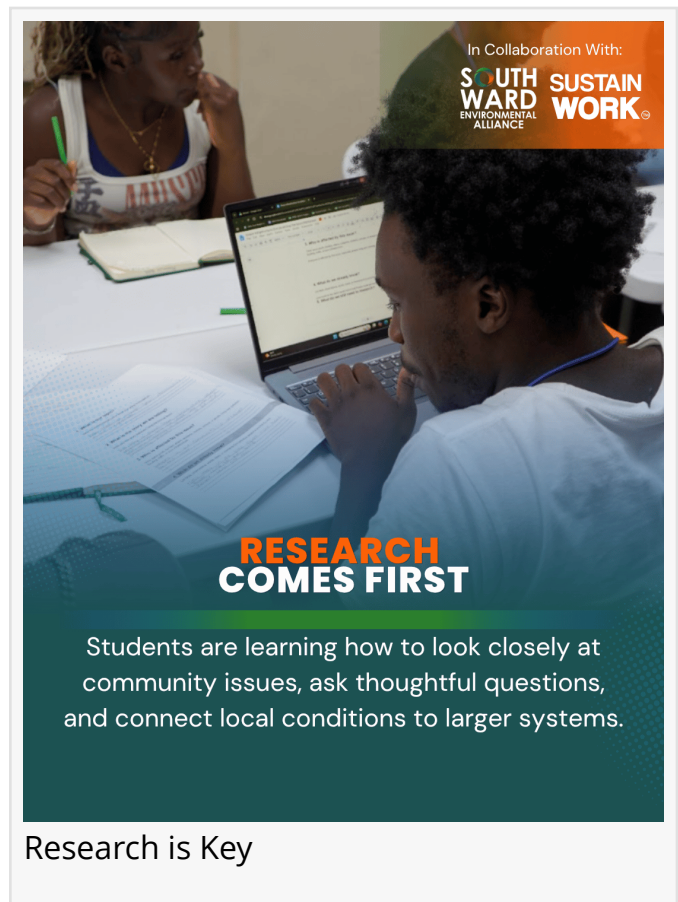
"Environmental justice requires an informed and engaged community, and that includes our young people," said Kim Gaddy, Founder and Executive Director of the South Ward Environmental Alliance. "When students can take what they've learned and communicate it to others, they start to see themselves as advocates."

The three films

Newark Stinks examines diesel emissions from the trucks moving through Newark

neighborhoods, tracing the city's position inside a freight corridor that includes the Port of New York and New Jersey and Newark Liberty International Airport. The team's question: what are residents actually breathing as goods move through the city every day? About one in four Newark children has asthma, roughly three times the national average.

The Life of a Box follows a shipping container from the moment cargo arrives at the port, through the longshore workers who unload it and the trucks that carry it into surrounding communities. The team frames the story around consumption, taking a twofold approach: the more people order, the more that must be shipped, and the more trucks move through the neighborhoods along the route. Nearly 4.9 million containers moved through the Port of New York and New Jersey in 2025, roughly 19,000 on a typical working day.



A Life With No Trees examines what a neighborhood loses when trees are missing from its streets: less shade, more heat absorbing pavement, more stormwater with nowhere to go.

“

Advocacy isn't only knowing what needs to change. You have to be able to communicate why it matters.”

Jeanette Mitchell, Chief Amplifier, Sustain Work

Newark's canopy is unevenly distributed, and 35 percent of residents live in areas below the city average, with parts of the East Ward at 5 percent cover. The team looks at the work already underway to change that, including SWEA's tree canopy coordinator, who plants and maintains street trees alongside residents. Through a Nature Conservancy grant program, coordinators now cover every ward in the city.

How the program works

SWEA provided the environmental justice curriculum, covering air quality, freight and goods movement, diesel emissions, green infrastructure, community health and the role residents play in advocating for their neighborhoods.

[SustainWork](#), a longtime G.A.L.A. partner, led the storytelling and digital advocacy component alongside Every Monday Morning Studios, which delivered hands on production training. Students learned to develop interview questions, identify credible sources, build storyboards, conduct interviews, capture footage and decide what an audience needs to know.

"Advocacy isn't only knowing what needs to change. You have to be able to communicate why it matters," said Jeanette Mitchell, Amplifier-in-Chief of SustainWork. "These students can ask the questions, document what's happening and interview the people who live it. That's civic participation."

Youth G.A.L.A. is one of three G.A.L.A. tracks, alongside G.A.L.A. Business and Passport to Green Jobs.

Multimedia available: Photos of students in production are included with this release. Film stills, trailer and b-roll available on request. About the South Ward Environmental Alliance.

The South Ward Environmental Alliance (SWEA) is a Newark-based environmental justice organization working to build healthy, sustainable neighborhoods by ensuring residents have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their communities. SWEA works across air quality, environmental health, green infrastructure, water equity, community engagement and green economic opportunity. Learn more at www.southwardea.com.

About SustainWork

SustainWork helps social good organizations strengthen their impact through communications, storytelling, digital advocacy, documentation, organizational systems and capacity building. Its Storytelling for Impact approach treats storytelling as organizational infrastructure, a way to document work, preserve knowledge, demonstrate impact and inspire action. SustainWork has partnered with SWEA on the development and growth of G.A.L.A. Learn more at www.sustainwork.org.

About Every Monday Morning Studios

Every Monday Morning Studios (EMM Studios) provides professional media production and creative storytelling services. For Youth G.A.L.A., EMM Studios delivered hands-on instruction in interviewing, visual storytelling, filming, civic journalism and documentary production, helping students take their story concepts from storyboard to finished film.

Jeanette Mitchell
Sustain Work
+1 973-204-0311
hello@sustainwork.org



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