

## Youth as Partners in Civic Leadership 2009 Highlights



### 2009 “Got Voice? Make Change!” Conference

The “Got Voice? Make Change!” Conference was held November 13-15, 2009, at the Wisconsin Lion’s Camp in Rosholt, WI. The conference had 149 participants including 111 youth and 38 adults. Participants made up 18 youth/adult teams representing communities, schools and youth-serving organizations from urban, suburban, and rural areas from all corners of the state as well as American Indian Reservations in Wisconsin.

More than 25 youth and adults representing a variety of organizations got involved in conference planning meetings either at face-to-face meetings or by joining a teleconference. Throughout the year, YPCL members met to plan and coordinate the conference with: two whole group face-to-face meetings, one committee face-to-face meeting, 7 large group teleconferences and many more committee meetings in order to conduct a successful conference.

The conference theme “Got Voice? Make Change” as well as conference goals listed below were agreed upon in order to create a energizing and informative conference that brings together teams of diverse youth and adults to work on issues that affect their communities. Teams and individuals explored salient issues in our state and society: healthy relationships, teen sexuality in the media, the environment, alcohol use and abuse and diversity. After the issue sessions, participants went to tactical sessions to engage with new ideas and learn new skills that will help them get their voice heard in the issues that matter to them. Each team then worked on an action plan for when they get back to their community and created a presentation for the whole group to announce their plans. A final session focusing on policy briefs created by Wisconsin Youth Voice helped solidify ways to create a movement of youth voice in Wisconsin and encourage further engagement in local and statewide issues.

### Conference Goals Were Met

- **Gather and engage, at the conference and in their communities, a diverse group of youth and adults who believe in youth voice**
  - Nine of the 18 conference sessions were led by people of color. Five were led by youth and adults from rural communities.
  - 80% of conference participants reported that exchanged ideas and formed friendships with people from diverse backgrounds.
  - When asked the most valuable experience at conference, a young person responded, “Mostly getting to meet new people. Back home there is zero diversity and I love seeing all the culture and learning/networking with all of these people with different backgrounds.”
- **Develop and share communication, advocacy for change, and leadership skills among youth/adult teams**
  - 84% reported they strengthened communication, leadership and other life skills at the YPCL conference.
  - 73% reported they made contacts that I will continue to network with.
  - When asked the most valuable experience at conference, a young person responded, “Meeting all these other people that were trying to make a difference. You don’t realize how many kinds are trying to make change until you get them all into one, very powerful group... this conference.”
  - All participants were given opportunities to take leadership roles or speak in front of the whole group at conference in roundtable discussions, open-stage, large group reflection, team presentations and during cabin talks. One young person

highlighted her experience facilitating as the most valuable experience of conference: “The youth voice policy briefs interest me a lot, so facilitating one of the sessions was rewarding.”

- **Provide models of community actions led by youth and adult partnerships**
  - 10 of the 18 conference sessions included both youth and adult presenters; 2 were completely youth-led.
  - “The strategy and planning sessions... and the experience of meeting others and hearing about their work has helped improve the vision and design of our program in the very brief time we attended.” - Adult Partner
  - Wisconsin Youth Voice shared policy brief models and action kits for teams to advocate for youth voice in their communities and with elected officials.
- **Increase engagement in local and statewide issues**
  - 86% reported they are more likely to work to involve youth in *local* public policy decisions and issues.
  - 68% reported they are more likely to work to involve youth in *state* public policy decisions and issues.
- **Build the movement for youth voice in Wisconsin and connect with public officials**
  - 81% reported that conference prepared them to facilitate a conversation in my community around youth voice policy.
  - 70% reported they felt prepared to meet with an elected official to discuss youth voice policy.
  - Two locally elected officials participated in the Wisconsin Youth Voice Policy Brief session and provided feedback on how to create policy support for youth voice in Wisconsin.

#### **Post Conference Action and Follow-Up**

In 2008, Wisconsin Youth Voice (WYV), a youth voice coalition, and YPCL merged in order to combine efforts. For the last two years, WYV has led a whole group session at the YPCL conference that focuses on bringing the ideas and skills learned at conference into a larger youth voice context that builds a statewide movement for youth voice. In 2009, WYV created two policy briefs that outline policy options and implementation models for creating policy support for youth voice in public decision-making. After discussing these policy briefs, teams were given the opportunity to commit to taking action by contacting a locally elected official, state elected official to talk about youth voice policy or to facilitate a discussion in their community about youth voice policy. In addition to following up with teams on the action plans that made at conference, WYV and YPCL will be following up with teams on their commitments to use these policy briefs.

*“I was impressed by the people who came and how well organized the conference was. It’s a model I will use and share for any future conferences I organize. Thanks again for a wonderful weekend and an inspiring conference!” – Adult Partner*