

1-1-1999

Youth Act! for Human Rights

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Recommended Citation

Youth Act! for Human Rights, "Youth Act! for Human Rights" (1999). *Project Summaries*. 50.
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Youth Act! For Human Rights

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This pilot project, funded by The Ford Foundation, establishes *Youth Act! For Human Rights* initiatives in two locations (Washington, DC and Vancouver, WA), conducts social justice activism training for young people within these communities, challenges youth to put their newly learned human rights education into action, and provides a vehicle, via community advocacy summits, for them to showcase the results of their human rights activism.

Youth Act! For Human Rights presents a unique opportunity for young people to analyze and work to solve community problems from the root level. The comprehensive approach – through application of the human rights framework – allows youth to understand the connection between the different problems in their lives and human rights. Participating youth are encouraged to identify local issues of concern, placing special emphasis on economic and social rights. *Youth Act! For Human Rights* is committed to training youth to solve social justice problems so they can grow to become adults committed to activism and working for change.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Develop partnerships with youth serving organizations that represent young people of all backgrounds, learning abilities, and leadership experiences.
- Train up to 12 groups of youth in advocacy and human rights.
- Conduct activism on human rights issues in the Vancouver, WA and Washington, DC that aims to change specific rules, laws, decisions, and/or policies that affect young people.
- Develop a corps of youth activists who can speak on key human rights issues that affect youth.
- Introduce youth to the concept of digital citizenship – an important advocacy tool for the new millenium.
- Conduct advocacy Youth Summits to celebrate the accomplishments of participating youth.

YOUTH OUTCOMES

Young people involved in this project will gain essential life and social skills. These skills include: knowledge of human rights and the human rights framework for addressing community problems; advocacy and leadership skills; community mobilization skills; media and public speaking skills; conflict management and communication skills; problem solving and critical thinking skills.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this project please contact Stefanie Bray at 202-293-0088 x249 or sbray@streetlaw.org.

NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

Youth Act! For Human Rights



SCHOOL/TEAM: Tri Youth Groups of Clark County

ADVISOR: Jesika Mata

YOUTH ACTIVISTS: Kina Bjora, Edlyn Clevenger, Danya Clevenger, Caitlin Deschner, Shannon Larsen, Jessica Latkovich

PROJECT:

Develop specific recommendations to local, county, state, and federal legislators for addressing teen homelessness in Clark County

DESCRIPTION:

The Tri Youth Groups of Clark County, composed of students representing many of the key youth leadership initiatives in the county – the Youth Consultants, Youth Commissioners, and the Minority Youth Leadership – focused their advocacy efforts on developing recommendations to legislators on addressing the issue of teen homelessness in Clark County. Because so little was previously known about this human rights issue, the group began by conducting research and gathering information from a broad spectrum of community members.

Students hosted meetings for interested community members and developed a list of concerns and questions they wanted to address. They met with Sally Erickson, Director of the Council for the Homeless, Representative Val Ogden, and staff from several organizations that serve homeless youth to learn their perspectives on the issue and to discuss how best to present their findings. Students inquired about the existence of current or upcoming legislation that would address the issue. By reaching out to local decision-makers and experts, students developed a group of allies who are now able to provide essential advice and support. In order to gain direct input from homeless youth, they also developed a survey (attached) which was distributed by staff at the Oak Bridge shelter. The survey asked teens about the services they needed, why they became homeless, what would have prevented them from becoming homeless, and the barriers they have encountered to getting off the street. These results were factored into the recommendations as well.

The students recommend that Clark County create a drop-in center, provide more shelter beds for youth, and provide more services and support for youth including transitional housing. The Tri Youth Groups of Clark County will present their recommendations and findings to their local, county, state, and federal legislators and ask these decision-makers to support their efforts to bring the human rights principles of dignity and respect to all citizens of their county, including homeless teens. Through their diligent advocacy, homeless teens in Clark County will now have a voice in the policies that affect their lives.

Youth Act! For Human Rights

**SCHOOL/TEAM:**

Peacetrain, Vancouver School of Arts and Academics

ADVISORS:

April Chambers, Richard Galeno

YOUTH ACTIVISTS:

April Chambers, Tamara Huckaby, Kari Kunst, Emma Nabors,
Jessica Nabors, David Nelson, Carrie Sisson

PROJECT:

Use a broad range of advocacy strategies to initiate change in policies and perceptions on teen homelessness in Clark County

DESCRIPTION:

Truly applying the advocacy golden rules of clarity, quantity, and frequency, Peacetrain members initiated an extensive human rights campaign that required the use of many advocacy strategies. Students wrote letters to nine legislators expressing their views on teen homelessness and requesting the legislators' position on the issue and their suggestions for action. Students felt it was particularly important in an election year to find out where their representatives stood on the issue. They also circulated a petition that urged elected officials to implement policies that support the human rights of homeless teens. Youth will present the more than 300 signatures to their representatives.

In April, Peacetrain activists staged a Peace Week for their entire school community, focusing on the issue of teen homelessness and human rights. They handed out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, circulated their petition, organized a resource table, distributed a special human rights edition of their newsletter *Peace Be With Youth*, and sold Peace-grams. In addition, the students distributed campaign pins which featured the number "51" – the number of homeless teens in Clark County on any given night, and the statement "Teen Homelessness: You have a roof, why shouldn't they?" This message supports the work of other Youth Act! teams who developed this campaign theme for their advocacy projects. The week-long event was an excellent way to educate their peers and involve more students in human rights advocacy.

Finally, students have used the media and have conducted extensive research to present their message to a wide audience. They researched and wrote their junior year papers on the topic of teen homelessness and authored an article which will be featured the "Youth Voice" column of *The Columbian*, their local newspaper. Through their comprehensive advocacy approach, Peacetrain students will have reached thousands of Clark County citizens.