

# YOUTH in ACTION

## CAPITOL DAY

FEBRUARY 3, 2017

### Stories of Positive Change

*Share the following stories with your group! They help reveal that young people can be very influential with their peers, parents, the press, the private sector, and policy-makers all over the nation.*

#### ALCOHOL & DRUGS

Seventh graders in Dallas documented the number of liquor stores in their neighborhood, especially near schools. They traveled to the state legislature to present their findings. Senator West, a strong supporter, declared "The children motivated me. I'm going to do all I can to help get the bill passed." The state law was changed to allow the local zoning board to reduce the number of liquor stores.

Students in Omaha, Nebraska conducted a student survey at their school and the results led them to set up a before-school and after-school substance abuse help group. This group networks with agencies throughout the city and refers students in need to the proper professionals and community agencies.

#### DISCRIMINATION & RACISM

Compelling testimony by young people based on their personal experiences of discrimination convinced wary Massachusetts legislators to pass a landmark Gay and Lesbian Student Rights Law. Students, with the support of the Lieutenant Governor, spoke at hearings, met with individual lawmakers, organized a massive letter-writing campaign, and held rallies and candlelight vigils that raised public support for a law aimed to "provide all students with a safe and supportive public education."

More than 10,000 students in Los Angeles walked out of classes in 1994 to demonstrate against a California referendum barring undocumented immigrants from attending schools and receiving other public services. Leonardo Hernandez, 16, who was among the Montabello High School demonstrators said, "Maybe if they see us, people will realize that this is what will happen if the proposition passes because we will all be in the streets instead of school."

#### EDUCATION & SCHOOLS

Art classes were disappearing in Portland, Oregon. One student was so upset that she wrote to rock star Jackson Browne and asked him to hold a benefit concert. To her surprise, she got a call at home from Browne himself who agreed. The concert raised \$100,000 for arts education and the students, in cooperation with the school board, decided how the money would be spent.

To combat anti-gay prejudice, several students succeeded at creating a Gay-Straight Alliance Club at their high school in North Carolina. Persistence and networking made the difference. Despite their fear of violence and the principal's resistance, the students let it be known that they might file a grievance against the school for violating the Equal Access Act. The group received support from the local Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network chapter.

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH & STRESS

Allie Young of Pinellas County in Florida recognized the need for more education and visibility about eating disorders because of her own battle with the disease. She formed Helping Hands, a support group at her school for teenagers coping with anorexia nervosa. Her advocacy efforts included a campaign to raise awareness of the need for every county in the state to provide comprehensive services and treatment geared for those suffering from this life-threatening disease, especially those unable to pay for expensive hospitalization.

Seventeen-year-old runaway, Janna Koschene of Colorado, presented a vivid account of sleeping in cars and overnight shelters at hearings conducted by a congressional committee. She gave detailed recommendations based on her own positive experiences at a daytime drop-in center in Denver. At a time when budgets were being cut, Congress voted a modest increase for federal funds earmarked for crisis shelters and other community-based youth centers.

## RECREATION & YOUTH SERVICES

In Hopkins, Missouri (population 600), a high school sophomore wanted to turn an abandoned theater into a teen center. After recruiting some friends, they made a presentation to Community 2000 and wrote a short article in their weekly newspaper. Bingo! As a result of this publicity, the students received an anonymous donation of \$40,000 to fulfill their need.

## TEEN SEXUALITY

A high school class in Ohio took on the problem of teen pregnancy and interviewed dozens of people in the community from doctors and correctional officers to a teen mother. They approached their school board for funds and published a booklet, to educate others which was done so well that the local medical center and area schools distributed it.

Two hundred students traveled to the state legislature in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to protest a welfare reform proposal requiring parental consent for abortions for minors. At the rally, the Teen Health and Welfare Coalition presented a petition with more than 1,000 signatures saying that "teenagers should be consulted before legislation is passed that affects our lives."

## VOTING

The Cambridge City Council in Massachusetts passed legislation lowering the voting age to 17 by a vote of 8-1 in March 2002. The year before, a proposal by the student-led Campaign for a Democratic Future that would have given 16-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections was defeated. One opponent on the City Council was persuaded because "This group stayed with it" and another councilor changed her mind: "Your energy, persistence, and commitment are truly inspiring." This suffrage battle continues now at the state legislature because Massachusetts, like many other states, must approve a home rule petition.

Create. Inspire. Change.