



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

ADVOCATING FOR THE FUTURE



METRO YOUTH ADVOCATES 2014

The second year of the youth advocacy program Metro Youth Advocates (MYA) was an immense success. Over 8 sessions, students strengthened their advocacy, public speaking, problem solving, and critical thinking skills through intensive trainings, while engaging meaningfully with public officials, community leaders and youth from across the Louisville Metro Region. Each session introduced the students to a new perspective on advocacy through panels and speed networking with community representatives. The topics of focus included:

- An introduction to advocacy
- Understanding the scope of local government
- Including stakeholders and developing community involvement
- Incorporating businesses and economic reasoning
- Tailoring their message and communication methods to the legislative process
- Seeking support from philanthropists and media.

Students also had the opportunity to work in small groups during each session. After participating in an education fair that brought together many organizations and initiatives from around Louisville to inform students about pressing community issues, the students identified ten topics that they were most passionate about addressing. They worked in policy groups throughout the program to learn more about their chosen topic areas and to develop a policy recommendation. Each group presented their ideas and research to an audience of government officials, community leaders, teachers, mentors, families and friends at the end of the program.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

- This year's program brought together **96** youth advocates
- Students came from **27** high schools
- The group was comprised of **10** different self-identified ethnicities
- **26** Metro Council districts and **35** zip codes were represented
- **83%** completed the full 8-session program

Child Abuse Prevention

This policy group found that over 8,518 children are reported to have been abused or neglected in 2013 in Jefferson County and among those reports, only 2,579 were investigated. Many of the children who face abuse are four years old or younger and most go undetected by authorities. The policy they are recommending mandates teachers to undergo additional training specifically focused on identifying signs of physical and psychological abuse and neglect. They wish to model this policy after laws such as Erin's Law that exist in many other states.

College & Career Readiness

In their research, this policy group found that 93% of middle school students have dreams of attending college, but by the time they reach senior year of high school that dream fades for 56% of them. Of those who do make it to college, only 26% make it to their graduation day. They believe that much of this drop-off can be attributed to the lack of counseling support in public schools. The student to counselor ratio in Jefferson County public schools is 408:1 while the national recommendation is 250:1. They propose a policy to increase guidance services for students, mandating individual meetings and including additional guidance on goal-setting, financial aid, and college prep in classrooms.

Healthy Foods

The Healthy Foods policy group learned that 62% of people in Metro Louisville are overweight, and only 20% of Metro Louisville Citizens achieve daily recommended fruit and vegetable intake. Upon finding that \$0.55 per dollar invested in local businesses goes back into the local economy in comparison to only \$0.15 per dollar spent at national businesses, they developed a policy recommendation to support local food suppliers. Focused on educating local consumers, their policy would provide local food suppliers an opportunity to connect with the community and expand accessibility of healthy foods.



Homelessness & Affordable Housing

This group found that the number of homeless people reported between the ages of 18 and 25 has doubled between 2011 and 2013. Additionally 39% of the homeless population is under the age of 18. They propose that JCPS high schools adopt a curriculum in advisory classes to help students understand the causes of homelessness and engage in open discussions about this issue. They hope that this class would increase awareness of available resource and money management strategies.

Public Works & Quality of Place

This policy group discovered that Louisville is one of the only major U.S. cities that has yet to adopt a tree ordinance. The implementation of tree ordinances protects public and commercial trees that naturally clean toxic air. A denser tree canopy prevents the urban heat island effect, something Louisville can benefit from because of record high warming rates. They recommend a tree ordinance for Louisville that prevents clear-cutting of commercial property and requires the planting of more trees on existing public properties.

Relationships & Sexual Health

This policy group found that teen pregnancy rates in Louisville average to 41.3 per 1000 live births as compared to the national average of 34.3. Sex education in Kentucky's new curriculum is coupled with other subjects under a course called "Practical Living." Their policy recommendation is to reinstate a full sex education course in Jefferson County public schools. They propose that the expanded class cover contraceptive use and abstinence practices, teen pregnancy, as well as the emotional and physical effects of intimate relationships.

Secondary Education

This working group found three faults with standardized testing: socioeconomic and racial biases exist within the system, the results are an inaccurate measure of student ability, and the preparation and test taking cause unnecessary stress to the students. They propose that school curriculum should foster creativity and practical lessons with less focus on standardized testing. Additionally they propose that the connection between funding for college and test scores should be removed.

Substance Abuse Prevention

This policy group found that current substance abuse education in the school system is not as effective as hoped, seeing as many teens continue to suffer from such illnesses. They propose that health classes expand the current content, starting with the 6th grade health classes, to let kids know the mental, emotional, and physical effects of substance use the challenges of overcoming addiction.



Vacant & Abandoned Properties

Through their research, this policy group learned that around about 5,000 properties in the community are vacant and another 1,000 are abandoned. This issue leads to a drop in property values which results in decreased infrastructure and services in neighborhoods. They propose a policy that provides tax breaks for businesses that donate goods or services to address housing related issues and price breaks on properties zoned for business.

Violence Prevention

This policy group discovered that over 2,500 children in Jefferson County are victims of abuse and thus are likely to continue the cycle of violence. Using preventative measures with younger children is an important step in ending this cycle. Their policy recommendation is to require that pamphlets are sent home with elementary students at the start of each school year along with the JCPS code of conduct to ensure that all JCPS elementary students and parents the signs of abuse understand how they can get the help they need for themselves or others in unsafe or unstable situations.

“Before MYA I had never taken part in creating public policy or speaking directly with business professionals in fields that interest me. Now, I am more aware of the opportunities for youth within my community, and I understand how I can actively impact important events in my community. Metro Youth Advocates inspired me to take charge and follow through with my goals.”

“There are so many problems we face today that our local leaders cannot solve by themselves. As a teen, sometimes we look at things from a different perspective and I’d like to work with other teens in order to bring about positive change in our community.”

BECOME INVOLVED

For more information on how to participate, volunteer, support, or start MYA in your city please visit www.metroyouthadvocates.org or email contact@kyyymca.org.



View the student presentations at www.youtube.com/KentuckyYMCA.



Check out the rest of the photos on our MYA Facebook album at www.facebook.com/KYYMCA.



Join the conversation about Louisville's future leaders by using #LouYouth.



On behalf of the Metro Youth Advocates Class of 2014 we would like to thank our partners and sponsors of this year's program!

