



GSAFE recently became the home organization of Youth Empowering Students (YES). YES is a youth of color organizing project currently focused on building the leadership of students of color, including LGBTQ students of color, at Memorial High School in Madison. YES members use their personal stories and experiences to highlight the main causes of and potential solutions to the achievement gap.

CENTERING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

GSAFE has always placed a strong emphasis on our youth leaders and their development. Our approach is to work in partnership with young people to build and implement our youth programs. Students hold unique solutions to the challenges they face, and our job is to make sure they have the training and support to plan and carry out those solutions. GSAFE staff work with youth to identify emerging needs and generate possible programs to address those needs. We ask questions and, as needed, share our concerns without dictating decisions. This approach is quite different from adult-led programming, where staff make decisions and set priorities and look to token youth representatives to rubber stamp ideas placed in front of them. Does that mean we always get working with youth right? No, but we continue to strive toward true youth-adult partnerships in our work.

In this newsletter, we're focusing on youth leadership and highlighting some of our youth programs and approach to centering youth leadership. Additionally, we'll introduce you to some of our new youth leadership programs which focus on building the leadership specifically of LGBTQ

and ally youth of color and transgender youth. From profiles of student leaders to tips on creating youth-adult partnerships, we hope you find these stories and resources both informative and inspiring. **If you're looking to deepen your knowledge even further, make sure to register for Safe Schools, Safe Communities: State Conference on LGBT Youth on April 11, 2014 at UW-Parkside in Kenosha.**

Thank you for all the ways you support our work to help youth find their power to organize and create real change in their schools and communities. Youth are at the forefront of creating safe, just, and respectful schools, and they're doing it statewide on a daily basis. We're honored to get to work alongside them.

Sincerely,

Brian Juchems & Kristen Petroschius, Co-Directors

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Excerpted from *“Youth and Social Movements: Key Lessons for Allies”*
by Sasha Costanza-Chock, Assistant Professor of Civic Media, MIT



SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) youth played a pivotal role in the success of the Civil Rights Movement. Youth participation in social movements can provide us with important insights. While the following examples are drawn primarily from progressive movements in the U.S., [...] the key points about youth agency and participation extend across geography and political orientation.

Young people can be powerful agents of social change.

Many young people have the desire and capacity to transform the world, and are looking for opportunities to do so. In fact, youth have been key factors in nearly every major social movement in modern history. During the U.S. Civil Rights movement, Claudette Colvin was just 15 when she was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery Bus to a white person (nine months before Rosa Parks). Young Civil Rights Activists like Diane Nash developed new tactics like the Freedom Rides, and built powerful movement organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Youth activism is sometimes framed as a thing of the past, but nothing could be further from the truth. In 2012 alone, young people have been important participants in movements to topple dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, protest austerity measures and corruption in Greece and Spain, and defend public education in Canada and Chile. Young people across the world took part in the Occupy movement to draw attention to rising wealth inequality. Courageous undocumented youth activists (like Jorge Gutierrez, Nancy Meza, and many more in networks like United We Dream and Dreamactivist.org) conducted sit-ins that, in 2012, built enough pressure to force the Obama administration to announce a temporary deferral on the deportation of undocumented youth. These are only a few of many recent examples.

Youth often innovate social movement media practices.

We see this across movements and across decades: girls and young women created riot-grrl feminist Zine culture, record labels, and a DIY music industry in the '80s and early '90s. Middle and high school students used MySpace and text messages, as well as flyers and film screenings, to

circulate information about high school walkouts against the anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner bill (HR4437) in 2006. In 2007, youth used blogs and social media to organize actions around the civil rights issues prompted by the Jena 6 case, and in 2010 used Ustream to livestream DREAM activist sit-ins in Senator McCain's office to call attention to the need for immigration reform. In 2012-13, they used Facebook and Twitter to circulate information about Justice for Trayvon Martin, a Black youth murdered by a neighborhood watchman. Young people appropriate every new form of media for their own ends, including for social movement purposes.

Youth can speak truth to power, in ways their peers can hear.

Young activists often develop powerful concepts and use sophisticated aesthetic forms to call out or identify systems of oppression, speak up, and mobilize their peers. For example, take a look at the approaches used by groups like Youth Justice Coalition in Los Angeles, FIERCE LGBTQ youth and Global Action Project in New York City, and Detroit Future Youth. Peer-to-peer learning extends to social movement activity as well as to other areas that are more commonly discussed, such as digital media literacies. The Civil Rights Movement developed Freedom Schools; youth organizers today have developed spaces and networks for sharing both organizing and media making skills.

Youth movements frequently operate outside formal channels of political participation.

While many youth do participate in formal organizations (student groups, local chapters of national organizations, and so on), young people are more likely to become connected to social movement activity through their family or community. In addition, youth

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movements are increasingly transnational. Young people, especially immigrant youth, are often directly connected to social movements in other parts of the world, and are inspired by movements that they encounter via social media or television. Lastly, youth involved in social movements often engage in prefigurative politics: this means that they attempt to organize according to the principles they would like to see enacted in the broader world.

Often, youth who have to struggle the hardest develop the strongest connections to social movements. For example, in the U.S., LGBTQ youth of color, while often suffering violence, oppression, and exclusion, are also doing some of the most powerful organizing work. LGBTQ youth have been a key part of many modern social movements, not just LGBTQ struggles. In the U.S., many youth activists believe that explicitly challenging racism remains a crucial task for social transformation. Around the globe, wherever we look closely at social movements, we find that some of the most “invisible” young people are also the most active, engaged, and creative in movement strategy and tactics, as well as media production and use.



Can You Mentor a Youth?

GSAFE is currently seeking adults who are people of color and/or transgender to mentor LGBTQ and ally youth. Mentors establish a relationship based on encouragement and support and meet monthly either in-person or online.

**For more information,
email info@gsafewi.org or
call (608) 661-4141.**

WHAT YOUTH WANT

FROM ADULT ALLIES

GSAFE's GSA Outreach Manager, Tim Michael, asked members of our Youth Leadership Board “What do you need from adult allies?”. Here's what they said:

- Listen to what we have to say, and share our stories with other adults to help bridge those connections between generations.
- Don't write off our struggles. For example, don't say “in a few years this won't be an issue anymore.” It's an issue now, and we need your support.
- Treat our opinions as equally valuable. We can disagree on some things. Be okay with that.
- Acknowledge when you don't understand something, and please don't make things up. Say “I don't know” or “I don't understand.” Recognize that we have had some experiences that you have not.
- Please don't disregard what we're going through by saying “how easy we have it” today.
- Do your homework. Try to keep up on how language and understanding of identities are changing.
- The title of “ally” is earned. Just because you think you're a “cool adult” doesn't mean your actions actually communicate that.
- Don't say “you are so well-spoken *for your age*.” If we are well-spoken, just say that.
- Some freshmen are immature and unfocused. So are some juniors and seniors. And so are some adults. Pay attention to how it's culturally appropriate and even encouraged to be dismissive of freshmen and their ability to be leaders.



GSAFE's Youth Leadership Board helps our staff guide, design, and implement our programming.

MEET OUR YOUTH LEADERS: ALEXIA

“YES gave me the opportunity to get to know people and speak to people in positions of power and impact their way of thinking. I like to make people think about things.”

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT WHAT YES IS.

YES is an acronym for Youth Empowering Students. We are a group of youth leaders who are fighting to end the achievement gap [in Madison public schools]. We've met with everyone from the superintendent to the mayor and we do presentations. We meet Mondays after school at the Lussier Community Education Center. There are about 20 of us and we are growing by the day!

WHY SHOULD STUDENTS HAVE A SAY IN WHAT HAPPENS IN SCHOOLS?

Students should have a say because they are the ones going to school. As students we look up to teachers and we expect things from them that you wouldn't expect from someone on the street. We expect respect and determination and for them to show us that we can achieve. We expect them to be understanding.

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

My mom and Michelle Obama inspire me.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ANYTHING TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Inequality and stereotypes. Everyone deserves a chance. Everyone deserves to be seen as who they are based on their actions. As people of color we wouldn't have to fight so hard for success [if there were no inequality or stereotypes]. We would have more role models and people to look up to. We wouldn't have to search so hard to find someone to look up to if we all were equal.



WHY IS SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Because I feel like I am making a difference. YES gave me the opportunity to get to know people and speak to people in positions of power and impact their way of thinking. I like to make people think about things. Our way of living isn't fair. As an African-American woman I have to work twice as hard to achieve what a white woman would achieve in four years of high school and life. The expectations for an African-American woman are both higher and harder to achieve. That's why I'm fighting for equality.

WHAT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU'VE OVERCOME?

Finding who I am and trying to be comfortable with who I am; being content with my struggle because I know it's not going to last forever.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5 YEARS?

I see myself at college for social work, because I care about my community and young people in that community. I want to see more young people in school instead of hanging out on the street. I want to inspire young African-American females in generations to come. I want to be a role model to let them know they can achieve, and they can conquer everything this world throws at them.

SAVE THE DATE

*Celebration of
Leadership*

MAY 10, 2014

CREATING YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

By Tim Michael, GSA Outreach Manager

GSAFE is a member of the National Association of GSA Networks (NAGN), which is a group of organizations similar to ours around the country that is organized by the California GSA Network. Once a year, NAGN organizes a three-day gathering for staff and student leaders of GSA networks in a different city, creating a really unique opportunity for us all to come together, build relationships, and talk about the safe schools movement on a national scope.

During my first year at GSAFE, I traveled to Albuquerque with one of our student leaders for the NAGN's second annual national gathering. On the second day, everyone was asked to attend a workshop on youth-led organizations. When we came into the room, there were large pieces of posterboard on the wall that created the **Spectrum of Youth Leadership** (pictured below).

The facilitator walked through each one, explaining what an organization at that point on the spectrum might look like. She then explained that we were each going to do an assessment for our own state's organization. She asked the adults to step out of the room for a few minutes, and the students to remain there with her. When we were called back

into the room, the students were all standing off to the side. The facilitator asked the adults to place themselves along the spectrum, based on where we thought our organization fell. I thought for a moment about GSAFE, and then went and stood right in front of "Youth Involvement," leaning slightly toward "Youth Driven."

The facilitator then explained that she had asked the students to do the same thing while the adults were out of the room, and asked the students to place themselves on the spectrum where they had been before. Some of the students were in very different places than the adults from their states, and I was happy to see that the young person I went with placed herself pretty much right next to me.

At GSAFE, we strive to create intentional youth-adult partnerships. It is our goal to be moving further along this spectrum of youth leadership, providing students with meaningful and substantive opportunities to have a voice in shaping our programming, our organization, and the safe schools movement in Wisconsin. We recognize we always have room for improvement and pride ourselves on being thoughtful and intentional about how we center youth leadership in our work.



A SPECTRUM OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Adapted from "Making Space, Making Change: Profiles of Youth-Led and Youth-Driven Organizations," by the Young Wisdom Project of the Movement Strategy Center. ©2004

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN BUILDING YOUTH POWER....

By Key Jackson, Educational Justice Manager

1

YOUTH ARE ALWAYS THE EXPERTS IN THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE.

When we discuss what's happening in schools and community it is important to remember that youth are always the authority on what's actually going on.

2

WHEN YOU SAY YOUTH POWER, MEAN IT.

As adults it is incredibly easy to fall into power struggles with the youth we serve. Often we adopt the attitude of "Because I said so" or "I am the adult here," which ultimately acts as a disservice to the youth we work with. Open dialogue and criticism is not just important, it's also incredibly necessary in creating a youth-led space.

3

SUPPORT VS. SUPERVISION

There is a huge difference between supporting youth in a project and supervising them to ensure project completion. Adults should remember that we are here to support and serve our youth, not dominate their spaces.



WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools is supported by generous individuals, foundations, and businesses who share our vision of schools where all LGBTQ youth thrive. Below are some of our most generous institutional donors:

\$25,000 AND UP

Brighter Futures
The State Equality Fund
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

\$10,000 - \$24,999

The Brico Fund
Community Shares of Wisconsin
Madison Community Foundation
PFund Foundation

\$2,500 - \$9,999

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New Harvest Foundation

SAFE SCHOOLS SUSTAINERS

Safe Schools Sustainers are the leading donors who keep the programs of GSAFE going strong. By investing in our community and the lives of our youth, they give a gift that will change the future.

CHAMPIONS - \$10,000

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Purple Moon Foundation*

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MEET OUR YOUTH LEADERS: AYDEN

“Most ‘LGBT’ spaces try to include the ‘T,’ but are unintentionally noninclusive. I was thinking, ‘What would a space look like that creates some real unity for trans* youth in Madison?’”



FIRST OF ALL, WHAT DOES GEST STAND FOR AND WHY DID GEST START?

GEST stands for Gender Education, Expression, Equality, Sexuality, and Transgender Inclusiveness. At the end of the spring GSA conference in 2013, I was talking to Lane (GSAFE’s social work field student) about the fact that there aren’t really any spaces for trans* youth in

Madison. Most “LGBT” spaces try to include the “T,” but are unintentionally noninclusive. I was thinking, “What would a space look like that creates some real unity for a community that largely only connects over social media, while also providing opportunities for training?”

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING?

I thought it would be really cool to both train the members of the group to use their identities as a tool to train others, while also teaching folks outside the group that trans* folks have lots of life opportunities. When you are facing so much oppression, you may think that your options are limited. You can build community.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE GETTING IT STARTED?

It was a little shaky. We didn’t totally know what we wanted. We didn’t want to copy Teens Like Us or Youth Leadership Board. We wanted to create something unique. Another struggle was finding folks to come. The LGBT community is already small, and the trans* community in Madison is even smaller. We were hoping to find parents who could connect their youth to the group, but so many folks aren’t out to their parents.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE GROUP?

A lot of community building. It’s a space where people are genuinely comfortable with one another. And that’s huge. I can’t name it specifically, but finding a group that actually feels open and safe for your identity is so important.

GEST HAS ALSO BEEN WORKING WITH THE TRANSPARENT GROUP. TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT.

We meet with the TransParent group every other meeting, and we play with the younger kids. Some of them are like

6 years old, and we play games with them like Duck, Duck, Goose. We also have a teen space within that group for folks to talk about what they’re going through.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR GEST?

My biggest dream was simply to have more people be able to go. I wanted to offer resources for parents, and help parents understand that their kids are normal. In the end, promoting acceptance is just the biggest goal you can have. Giving them that space where they can feel accepted, because they can’t always find that in the bigger world.

GEST meets every other Monday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information about the group and to find out about upcoming meetings, email Lane at lane@gsafewi.org.

trans is an umbrella term that refers to all of the identities within the gender identity/expression spectrums, including transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, gender non-conforming, two-spirit, agender, etc.*



WELCOME OUR NEW STAFF: ALI MULDROW

We’d like to extend a warm welcome to our new Racial Justice Youth Organizer, Ali Muldrow. In this new position Ali is responsible for building and implementing GSAFE’s new Racial Justice Program. This program is focused on building the leadership of LGBTQ and ally youth of color in Madison public high schools.

Born in May 1987 in Madison, Wisconsin, Ali Muldrow has an intimate understanding of the Madison Public School District. She is honored by the opportunity to empower young people as they address the issues of oppression that impact them and their communities while working with GSAFE. Ali has worked to create classes and workshops that celebrate the diversity of her community for the last seven years. She played a key role in creating Wisconsin’s first Spoken Word English elective class at Madison’s East High School. Ali considers her greatest strength to be her ability to listen and she believes deeply in the power of music. Ali is a mother, partner, artist, and hardcore standup comedy fan. She also loves poetry, tea, shooting stars, good books, and made-up words.

SAVE THE DATE!

**SAFE SCHOOLS,
SAFE COMMUNITIES**

**STATE CONFERENCE
ON LGBT YOUTH**

April 11, 2014
8:30 a.m.–4:15 p.m.
UW-Parkside Student Center
Kenosha, WI



Bringing together adults who work with youth and youth leaders who are interested in the safety and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth.

Registration information available at www.gsafewi.org.

