

SOCIAL ACTION – EVERYONE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Produced by the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team (revised 8/08)

Definition: 1. a hands-on approach to problem solving; a response to the "I know what I would do if I could make the big decisions" feeling. 2. Converting your imaginative and innovative ideas into action that has an impact on your block, in your neighborhood, city, state, or the world (or anywhere else!).

Who can take social action?

YOU CAN!!!! Anyone can effect social change. You don't have to be the smartest, the most experienced, or even the only one to ever come up with your idea. Children, parents, and anyone else with the drive to desire to have an impact and make a difference can cause social change.

The Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team believes that there are 5 basic ways in which we can bring about changes:

MENTAL: Raising awareness with ideas, planning (coming up with new approaches, poetry slams, etc...).

PHYSICAL: Going out and doing something (cleaning up a playground, protesting, putting up posters and signs about an issue in your community).

ECONOMIC/FINANCIAL: Raising money (e.g. bake sales, t-shirt sales)

SOCIAL: Person to person (e.g. workshops, peer education, etc...)

POLITICAL: Changing rules, policies, laws (e.g. writing to elected officials, testifying at a hearing).

Make a Difference

Use the following list of topics to help figure out what types of issues interest you:

Abuse & Neglect, Animals, Arts & Crafts, Children, Computers & Technology, Day Care, Education, Elderly, Employment (summer jobs for youth), Environment, Foster Care, Health and Medicine, Homophobia Homelessness, Hunger, Literacy, Mentoring, Music, Nutrition, Parks and Recreation, People with Disabilities, Poverty, Public Safety, Racism, Recycling, School Dropouts, Sex Education, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Sports, Teenage Pregnancy, Teenage Stress/Suicide, Theater, Tutoring, Violence, Women and Girls.

Once you've decided what your interest area is you can follow --

Ten Easy Steps to Taking Social Action:

- **Identify your issue or concern.** What problem do you want to tackle? What topics do I care about?
- **Learn all about it.** You can't adequately address a concern if you have not fully explored it.
- **Brainstorm Solutions.** Think of several different ways that you could address your problem.
- **Find your support.** Find people who feel the way that you do about the problem that you have chosen to address.
- **Learn who is on the other side.** Find out who is against your proposed solution.
- **Publicize.** Tell everyone that you are trying to solve the problem that you have identified.
- **Fundraise.** You don't have to have a million dollars.
- **Follow Through.** Adhere to your plan and do what said you would do.
- **See if your plan is working.** Perform periodic evaluation to see if changing your approach or tactics would be helpful.
- **Hang in there.** Realize that most change does not happen overnight. Immediate results would be great, but prepare yourself to be persistent if the process takes longer than you originally planned.

What Tools Can You Use?

- Use your telephone. Ask questions, conduct surveys, lobby policy makers, organize and collect information. The telephone can be a powerful tool!
- Write Letters. You can write letters to gather or share information, thank people for their work and show your support of them, try to influence or convince people that your method will work, to identify a concern or present a solution, or to ask for assistance.
- Write a petition. Petitions can be used to showcase your support for your solution, gain attention, or create awareness. Identify the person or group that can actually do something in response to your petition.
- Write a proposal for your plan of action. Identify the individuals and groups that can be of assistance to you as you bring your proposal to reality.

- *Get media coverage.* Identify the television and radio stations, local and neighborhood newspapers, and magazines in your community. Create a press release that is concise to put in circulation.

You must be the change you wish to see in the world - Mahatma Gandhi.

Adapted from:

Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team "5 Ways to Make Change in Your Neighborhood."

And

Lewis, Barbara. The Kid's Guide to Social Action. Free Spirit Publishing. Minneapolis, MN, 1991.

For more information about the Young Women's Action Team, visit our website at www.youngwomensactionteam.org,

HOW TO START YOUR OWN YOUTH-LED PROJECT

Before you start your project, we recommend that you go through a careful assessment of yourself and your community.

Personal Readiness

- Do you like working with groups?
- Do you like the challenge of being a leader who can encourage others to take on leadership as well?
- Are you able to guide groups toward compromise by identifying points of agreement?
- How open are you to learning as you go?
- Are you excited about starting something totally new?

Community Readiness

- Can you identify community members who care about the issue that you want to address and would welcome an opportunity to champion the cause in their community?

1. Define the Issues

- ◆ Some youth-led groups are organized to bring people together around a variety of concerns. Others begin as a response to a crisis - an outbreak of racial tensions, etc...
- ◆ Talk to other young people to find out what they think the important issues are and what should be done. At the same time, collect information about the issues.
- ◆ What's the history of the issue or issues that you're dealing with? Your local public library, community newspaper, and the internet are likely to have answers.

2. Research the Community

- ◆ Find out what resources your community has - potentially friendly organizations, business and government leaders,

3. Build a Core Group

- ◆ Recruit a handful of people - three or four are enough - to help launch the organization.

Social Power Inventory

Look over this list of sources of social power. Check the ones that you possess.

- Community building skills* – the ability to bring people together and make them feel good
- Social skills* – the ability to work with many different people
- Verbal skills* – the ability to communicate or persuade others either individually or in a group
- Writing skills* – ability to communicate a message through writing
- Leadership skills* – the ability to articulate a vision and mobilize others toward a common goal
- Analytical skills* – the ability to figure out what needs to be done and how to do it
- Conflict resolution skills* – the ability to help people resolve or understand differences
- Research and information gathering skills* – the ability to find and use information and facts
- Artistic and cultural skills* – the ability to communicate through artistic expression
- Meeting facilitation skills* – the ability to run a meeting smoothly and effectively
- Courage* – the willingness to stand up for what you believe
- Persistence and determination* – the ability to work hard even when things are difficult
- Passion* – the ability to commit yourself wholeheartedly to what you believe
- Fearlessness* – the willingness to take risks
- Precision* – ability to work with numbers, to count accurately and “know where things are at”
- Follow-through with details* – the ability to do the little things that make the big things possible
- Accountability* – willingness to hold yourself and others responsible to the task
- Intellectual curiosity* – the desire to understand an issue as fully as possible
- Inspiration* – the ability to help others believe in themselves and their capacity for change
- Knowledge of your community, city or state**
- Knowledge or expertise on a given issue or subject**
- Knowledge of political or social systems**
- Access to resources* – ability to find money, space, people, talent or community connections
- Sense of humor and the ability to “roll with the punches”**
- Moral commitment* – a desire to change what is unfair or unjust

A Glossary of the Most Common Forms of Activism

Activist Trainings: Taking an interested body of people and giving them tools with which to organize or protest. Before the anti-choice group the Lambs of Christ invaded Fargo in 1991, for instance, staffers from the Fargo Women's Health Clinic trained volunteer escorts in decoying (that is, pretending to be a woman coming into the clinic while the real patient was brought in through another entrance), nonviolent confrontation, and how to avoid getting arrested. Other activist trainings might be less about skills and more about building knowledge. For example, the School of Unity and Liberation teaches young people the history of the civil rights movement or the state of globalization, to prepare them for activism.

Boycotts: Regular people using consumer power to protest the practices of a large corporation, which would typically ignore individual comments. To cite one example, since the early seventies Nestle has coercively distributed baby formula in developing countries with no sensitivity to the fact that the water used to mix the powdered formula is unclean and breast milk has proved to be an infinitely healthier choice. In 1977, activist groups called for a boycott of all Nestle products, which has continued (with a short hiatus) until today and which led the World Health Organization to promote the benefits of breast feeding and to draft "The International Code on the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes."

Canvassing: Literally going door-to-door providing information and consciousness-raising. Canvassing might be pamphleting for a local candidate or getting out the vote or fund-raising for United Way by ringing doorbells in your neighborhood.

Petitions: A list of signatures in support of a certain issue or person. Some petitions are formally important – part of a structure to get a name on a ballot or a referendum. There are also online petitions, which are employed when there is a broad call for people to send their names individually to a central address, or to put the petition up at a site that hosts petitions, like petitionsonline.com.

Protests: Usually a gathering of people to disrupt the status quo or to erode support for an issue or institution. Protests can be walking out of meetings, organizing a buy-nothing day, National Smoke-out, National Meat-Free Day, etc. In 1903 Mary Harris (Mother) Jones rallied together children working in factories and marched with them for nearly 200 miles, from city hall in Kensington, Pennsylvania, to President Theodore Roosevelt's house on Long Island, with their maimed fingers high in the air to protest child exploitation.

Sit-ins: Activists take over spaces that need to be changed and just stay there – sitting tight – until demands are met, consciousness is raised, or the media catch on. In Alabama in the early sixties, the lunch counters at Woolworths were integrated by black people who had the guts to sit in white-only spaces. Similarly, the male-run Ladies' Home Journal was invaded by New York Women in Media in 1971. Before the activists left his office, John Mack Carter, then editor in chief, agreed to give the feminists a special section in a future issue to report on women's liberation.

Speak-outs: A public meeting or protest that features personal testimonials, such as often happens at a Take Back the Night march. Speak-outs are generally used to break silence about a taboo subject and to demonstrate the urgency of a particular issue. Thus, the abortion speak-outs of the late sixties were daring, making the point that women were getting illegal procedures and in huge numbers, challenging the idea that something so necessary to many was criminalized.

Street Theater: Using guerilla art and acting to protest publicly. This might be performing The Vagina Monologues in the middle of Britain's House of Commons or throwing cherry pies at people who represent abuses of power, as pioneered by the Biotic Baking Brigade. This trio has pied former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown, Bill Gates, Pacific Lumber boss Charles Horowitz, and Keith Campbell, the geneticist who cloned Dolly the sheep. This form of activism tends to gather plenty of media coverage and makes a splash.

Tabling: Public education (pamphlets, handouts, or a person fielding questions at a table), usually taking place at some established event or space like a county fair, rock concert, or student union. Music for America has made a deal with many musicians to provide public education postcards at their concerts. The cards focus on the drug war, health care, and media consolidation – issues that are likely to get concert-goers to vote.

Teach-ins: Usually an informal crash course in a current and complicated political issue, making up for gaps or bias in the media coverage or one's education. After September 11, there were hundreds of teach-ins on college campuses that reflected how little most Americans knew about the Taliban until it directly affected us.

All of these traditional tools work in concert with one another. For instance, Rosa Parks attended activist trainings at the Highlander Folk School. In 1955, her refusal to give up her seat – a protest – spawned the Birmingham bus boycotts, and marked the moment when the civil rights movement became visible to the world.

Adapted from: *Grassroots – A Field Guide for Feminist Activism* by Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards (2005)

YWAT's Map for Social Transformation – create your own map for your issue...

Problem/ Action Area: Women and girls in Rogers Park are being harassed on the streets – on their way to school, work, the store, etc...

Overall Campaign Goal [What do you hope to accomplish?]: To decrease the amount of street harassment experienced by women and girls in Rogers Park.

Objectives [How will your goal be accomplished?]:

- 1) Raise the public's awareness that street harassment is a HARM and a form of violence against women and girls.
- 2) Build a base of individuals who are committed to ending street harassment.
- 3) Demand community accountability for the eradication of street harassment by involving ALL community members in this effort.
- 4) Get our alderman to improve the lighting on two main streets in Rogers Park – Morse Ave and Howard Street.
- 5) Get businesses to enforce no loitering outside of their stores, etc...
- 6) Get more police patrols during the key after school hours on Morse and Howard.
- 7) Provide more opportunities to young men in our community like employment and other activities.
- 8) Establish a "harm free" zone in Rogers Park.
- 9) Document the resistance to street harassment through the creation of a zine and video.

Allies [Who identifies with this problem?] and Opposition [Who will be opposed?]:

- Allies: our friends, families, anti-violence groups in our community, youth centers, elected officials, law enforcement, business owners, local media
- Opposition: harassers

Actions:

- Create the YWAT as a youth-led, adult supported social change organization
- Conduct research about the issue and publish our findings
- Hold community forums to promote key findings and recruit supporters
- Sponsor citywide day of action against street harassment (May 4th)
- Organize a community march against street harassment
- Write letters to key community leaders [elected officials, police commander] to make sure they respond to our recommendations
- Have Meetings with elected officials and other key stakeholders
- Launched the RESPECT poster campaign – a community education and accountability campaign

Outcome/ Evaluation:

- Number of actions [individual and collective] on Day of Action
- Number of businesses that participated in the poster campaign
- Number of educational workshops and trainings
- Press coverage
- Promise of better lighting
- More police patrols during key hours
- Number of young women and men that get involved with YWAT

Ways that the YWAT has gotten support for the issue of street harassment

1. Sharing the results of our research – community forums
2. Advocacy
 - Letter-writing to our local elected officials
 - Meetings with our local elected officials
3. Press coverage – media
4. Education
 - Offering workshops about street harassment (youth and adults)
 - Films
5. Create relevant outreach and educational materials
 - brochures
 - newsletter
 - posters
 - films
6. Creative resistance/direct action
 - Citywide day of action against street harassment
7. Community accountability
 - Respect Campaign

Who Were YWAT's potential allies?

- a. anti-violence organizations
- b. local community organizations that are concerned about safety
- c. police/law enforcement
- d. elected officials
- e. youth-serving groups
- f. women's groups
- g. local media
- h. community residents in Rogers Park