“Local and national policies that create lasting peace and justice are influenced by participants’ action projects” (Opportunity Grant Logic Model).

“I came to (Washington, DC) the city thinking that my voice was powerful, but upon leaving I knew it was not only powerful, but it mattered and there are people who will listen and work on creating change.” (New Orleans, LA)

BACKGROUND

With support from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)’s donor-funded 2013 Opportunity Grant Fund, AFSC’s Peace and Economic Justice Program in Washington, D.C. organized and hosted its first annual AFSC Youth Human Rights Summit, which took place over five days in June 2013. The Summit drew ten young people (seven high school students from New Orleans, LA; St. Louis, MO; Logan, West VA; and Washington, D.C., two college students from Earlham College in Greensboro, NC, and one college student from Washington, D.C.

The Opportunity Grants are intended to encourage, inspire and support innovative ideas within AFSC and improve learning from new program explorations, including initial testing of ideas for innovative strategies developed by visionary staffers that require support to get off the ground.

This first ever Youth Human Rights Summit was intended to:

- Broaden our young people’s understanding of community issues with a human rights approach
- Deepen young people’s commitment to peace, social justice, and activism
- Develop the skills of young people in the practice of public speaking, research, and advocacy for the issues they were most passionate about in front of their Congressional representatives.
- Strengthen AFSC’s service integration through collaboration.
- Build a new path for the agency to bring together our young people for a meaningful annual event to make positive impact at the local, national and international level.
- To introduce human rights learning to participants as a vehicle to address issues of conflict and social justice in their communities.
- To help participants define issues of conflict and social justice in their communities
- To help participants gain increased advocacy skills.
- To provide participants with the opportunity for advocacy and lobby with their elected officials at the U.S. Congress

Youth were selected to participate in the summit by Program Directors in each of these AFSC program office locations.

At the conclusion of a three-day intensive training, youth participants and their directors were able to petition their Congressional representatives with confidence and leave Washington, DC with an empowering and enduring civic engagement experience.
SUMMARY OF THE SUMMIT

Day One

- Human rights fundamentals
  - Defining the social justice issue
    1. New Orleans youth: prison reform
    2. Greensboro youth: immigration reform and in-state tuition for immigrant students
    3. St Louis youth: gun violence
    4. Logan youth: teen pregnancy
    5. D.C. youth: education reform

Day Two

- Youth issue-based research skills
- Public speaking

Day Three

- Advocacy Deep dive
- Role play rehearsals for Congressional visits

Day Four

- Legislative visits

3. **St Louis** youth: gun violence. Youth participants from St. Louis, Missouri met with Senator McCaskill and Congressman Clay.
4. **Logan** youth: teen pregnancy. Youth participants from Logan, West Virginia met with Senator Manchin, Congressman Rahall, and staff with Senator Rockefeller to discuss real solutions to teen pregnancy.

5. **D.C. youth**: education reform. Youth participants from Washington, D.C. met with Delegate Norton staff, Councilmember Cheh and Councilmember Catania staff.
Debrief and reflection
Action planning for advocacy at home

IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood of leadership in civic engagement/social justice activities</th>
<th>Before Summit</th>
<th>After Summit</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(+ 44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(+ 33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>(+ 70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>(+ 44%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge (UDHR)

| Organization that drafted UDHR                               | 56%          | 100%         | (+ 44%)  |

Skills/Attitudes (self-reported; 1-5 Scale)

| Confidence in Public Speaking                                | 3.38         | 4.22         | (+.84)    |
| Meeting With Public Officials                                | 4.00         | 4.56         | (+.56)    |
| Leadership                                                   | 4.11         | 4.56         | (+.45)    |
| Teamwork & Collaboration                                     | 4.44         | 4.89         | (+.45)    |
| Confidence in Interacting with Adults                        | 4.11         | 4.78         | (+.67)    |
| Research Skills                                              | 4.00         | 4.44         | (+.44)    |

NEXT STEPS

Youth participants are taking actions to leverage their assets to impact social change, designing clear follow-up strategies with local elected officials and other leading stakeholders in their respective communities, and to work together as a team of young leaders.

“I’ve become confident in my ability to identify human right violations and understand the power we have, as individuals, to make changes. Though our meetings with congresspersons and council members were organized by the AFSC, I got the opportunity to see how easy they are to arrange when I realized Councilmember David Catania had an interest closely aligned with my own and called his office to set up a meeting on my own” (DC participant)

Update: Community Work
1. **New Orleans** youth: prison reform

Youth from New Orleans have continued to be involved with issues related reform in Louisiana; both at individual prisons, such as the infamous Angola Prison in New Orleans, and the statewide system as a whole. Two on-going projects are the preparation of a mock prison reform bill to present to local elected officials and members of Congress. The participants are also planning to produce an arts how to support prison reform.

2. **Greensboro** youth: immigration reform and in-state tuition for immigrant students

Both North Carolina participants have returned home and continued to meet with local Congresspersons (including Congressman Coble) to advocate for comprehensive immigration legislation. After upcoming study abroad semester in Mexico, they are both planning a follow-up training for their peers at Guilford College; a local Quaker college. Finally, both students are taking initiative on local projects, including working to support a partnership with Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) to contact AFSC and FCNL supporters in the NC 6th District; encouraging them to write a letter to the editor and call Congressman Coble about immigration reform.

3. **St Louis** youth: gun violence

As a result of the meeting Sen. McCaskill in DC invited the participating youth to attend a forum she is hosting in St. Louis. This will focus on local issues and their connection to federal policies. In addition, St. Louis youth are working to organize youth in the schools they’re involved with to meet with Congressman Clay, advocating for change in their schools and neighborhoods; specifically around the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The D.C. Human rights convening also helped to reinvigorate the local Youth Empowerment Program (YEP!) in ST. Louis.

“In conversations following the summit, [one of the ST. Louis youth] has expressed an interest in continuing to engage (positively) his neighborhood and community. Before D.C. there was little to no interest in doing this, simply because he had never done any civic engagement before. In coming to DC and continuing to work with the St. Louis Office, he has come to see himself as an advocate for change. He also believes that change is possible, whereas he didn't before.” (Joshua Saleem, AFSC St. Louis)

4. **Logan** youth: teen pregnancy

Youth leaders in Logan met with Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Child Poverty and speak about teen pregnancy prevention at the Senate Select Committee on Child Poverty. The youth continue to raise awareness about the issue and have begun to push for expanded training for local teachers as part of their professional development offerings.
5. D.C. youth: education reform

Education reform will be a priority in the upcoming Washington, D.C. City Council Session and young leaders have committed to influencing local policy changes through testimonies and petitions. They will be organizing these actions as soon as the school year begins. Another young leader has vowed to bring this (Human Rights Summit) knowledge and information back to her home and college community as a platform for organizing human rights learning and advocacy clubs.

Young Leader Teamwork Post-Summit

- Facilitated by one of the participants, young people have participated in a follow-up video/phone conference to confirm their interest in ongoing group engagement and to determine next steps for working together.
- After deciding to create a Tumblr page (http://activist4change.tumblr.com/) to keep connected to one another, youth have begun to work with AFSC’s Communication Department to create it. The page will serve as a mini-blog for the group, and might include things like artistic work, updates from various cities in the project, and other ideas.
- The team is planning a “report out” on the Summit and on their related activities, to take place in September (?).
- The team hopes to participate in planning what they hope will be the second of an annual AFSC Youth event that might expand over time to include more youth, and youth from other AFSC program locations, both in the United States and internationally.

“[Two West Virginia youth from the] DC Human Rights summit were interviewed by Beth Vorhees, News Director at WV Public Radio, about teen pregnancy prevention. We had prepped for a couple hours before but when it was time to go, just the two of them went inside the studio. They came out beaming with accomplishment and Beth said she was “very impressed” by their knowledge of the issue (Lida Shepherd, AFSC West Virginia)
“I left DC with a much more defined sense of purpose and a greater understanding of the direction I would like to take my life. Words can’t describe my gratitude. In the future I hope to continue working with AFSC…” (North Carolina participant)

“My four-day experience with the American Friends Service Committee’s Youth Human Rights Summit was amazingly constructive in a very short period of time. I went in knowing very little about human rights, not knowing there even existed a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and left feeling secure enough in my knowledge to make a difference in my community (D.C. Participant)

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION/FEEDBACK:

On post-surveys, many students had difficulty selecting their favorite part of the Summit. Those with a preference stated that “the opportunity to meet youth from around the country” and the “opportunity to learn more about human rights” were highlights.