

2013 DC YOUTH HUMAN RIGHTS SUMMIT TESTIMONIES

From Washington, DC

By Morgan Dunstan (DC)

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. 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. The friendships I made were also incredible. I was exposed to a diverse group of extremely motivated, intelligent people and they made me want to work harder to do more. The AFSC-DC Youth Human Rights Summit is an amazing experience that I wish to continue supporting and working on, even if I don't participate in it at the lobbying-level again.

From NC

Reflections from NC Delegation to AFSC Human Rights Summit

Washington, DC

June 24-28, 2013

Jodie Geddes and Alex Garrison, both Guilford College students in Greensboro, NC, joined 15 other young people in Washington DC to attend AFSC's first Human Rights Summit June 24-28, 2013. The youth each picked topics to focus on, and each day participated in workshops giving them background on Human Rights and preparing them for speaking with US Senators and Representatives on their topics of choice. Alex and Jodie chose to focus on immigration reform, which was a hot topic; the immigration reform bill S744 passed the Senate while they were in DC. Here are their reflections on the experience.

Alex Garrison

On the train ride to DC I read a quote that stuck with me for the duration of the trip. The quote was by Mark Twain and reads: "The two most important days in your life are the days

your born and the day you find out why”. From the very first day of sitting in the office the words resonated inside me and brought vibrations of excitement. I can’t begin to describe the feeling of being surrounded by so many passionate advocates of human rights. It was liberating to say the least.

On the second day I began to grasp the magnitude of what we were to do and what we could do. As the third day arrived I, to be quite honest, was feeling a little overwhelmed and undereducated in our political system. This was where the true nature of AFSC shown through though. After sharing my concerns the friend’s network branched out. [AFSC staff] Jean-Louis, Amanda, Li, Monica, Lori, and many others all helped to alleviate the pressure and gave me confidence in my ability to lobby. I realized at this point that AFSC genuinely embraced its Quaker values.

On the final day when Jody and I entered Congressmen and Senators offices I felt fully prepared to represent our issue and I believe we did. 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, as well as uphold the values of which you guys stand for.

Jodie Geddes

I attended the first AFSC Human Rights Summit along with 15 other young people from June 24-30 in DC. We focused on understanding human rights, how that linked to the work of different AFSC offices, and how to effectively communicate with policymakers. In one workshop, we were given the tools in order to make sure that our thoughts were clear and concise when speaking with legislators.

When Alex and I visited Capitol Hill there were representatives who were not clear on many of the issues surrounding immigration reform, the work we did beforehand proved to be very beneficial. In combination with this, we also learned a lot about what are human rights and how they have developed. For example, did you know that *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and is still in existence? The declaration grants you as a human being 30 rights that must be honored and respected.

When I reflect on these rights I began to see the various ways that they are constantly being violated. When we talk about human rights, Article 7 stands out in my mind. “*All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination...*”

Many of my friends, family, have this very right infringed upon each day they walk into the world. The question of security is constantly being asked. It is my duty to protect and inform

my community members. I must admit this week has been a long one filled with emotions and though the end is not near there is light on this journey.

From West Virginia

By Lida Sheperd

Logan High Students Talk Teen Pregnancy Prevention with WV Congressional Delegation in D.C.

Washington, D.C. --- As part of Human Rights Summit hosted by the American Friends Service Committee last week in Washington, D.C., Logan High Seniors Ciara Campbell and Jimetta Early met with Senator Manchin, Congressman Rahall, and staff with Senator Rockefeller to discuss real solutions to teen pregnancy.

Campbell and Early are spokeswomen for the Believing All is Possible or (BAPS) Youth Leadership Group.

Campbell says teen pregnancy is a huge problem in West Virginia.

“West Virginia is ranked 9th in teen pregnancy. It’s is decreasing everywhere else and increasing here. At our school there is no sex ed class or anything to teach students about their responsibility. You have a bunch of young girls getting pregnant and having no idea what they will have to deal with,” Campbell said.

She says teen pregnancy is not only a health and cultural issue but, it is a cause of long term generational poverty.

“You end up having to drop out of school. You struggle to even get a GED and don’t get to go to college. There are no decent paying jobs available without at least a high school diploma. There is no way to make ends meet with a baby,” Campbell said.

BAPS youth leaders will next meet with Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Child Poverty and speak about teen pregnancy prevention at the Senate Select Committee on Child Poverty meeting July 23rd at 7pm at the Logan campus of southern.

From New Orleans

By Asia-Vinae Palmer

AFSC NOLA *Peace by Piece* Intern

Washington, D.C was extremely inspirational. American Friends Service Committee already constantly opens my eyes after every event we go to or take part in, but every second we were in

the city... I felt more and more powerful. It was amazing being around people who are all passionate about changing the world for the better. Although we weren't a large group, we all brought an immense amount of knowledge, experience, and passion to the room. The workshops we went through reminded each of us, young and old, that we are all still learning and we all have much to learn. I came to the city thinking that my voice was powerful, but upon leaving I knew that it was not only powerful, but it mattered and there are people who will listen and work on creating change.