

## **Youth Empowerment**

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*“The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.”*

- Nelson Mandela

As one action impacts a person in one place, that same action could continuously impact others in other places, resulting in a potential change over time. It starts with one person, or a group of people, doing something that they believe is right. Just like anyone who follows through with an act as such, the youth of today will impact what happens next in our world, after old ways are transformed into new. Social, political, and economic issues are taken on with steadfast motivation by the young people today, later suggesting changes and inspiring others that there is hope, and that we, the youth, hold that hope. We only need to decide how we want to use it.

I recently joined the Youth Empowerment Group at my high school. This group is run by students who decided they would provoke change in individuals if they brought it to my school. I was skeptical, questioning what power this small group of six students could have to change the world. We would soon discuss every political issue we felt needed to be addressed, eliminating any skepticism I previously had. The healthy debating brought about discussion of many world issues, like mental illness, birth control, climate change, women’s rights, racism, and domestic issues. After completing our first project, organizing a menstrual care drive for the homeless women in Rhode Island, my friends and I left feeling a sense of hope for our world. I realized that the only way to bring about change in our world of violence and hate is to empower the youth, and we are responsible for the beginning of the future. This seemed to be the beginning.

This new generation is responsible for bringing about change and fixing the problems in our world that have gone on for too long, as did the young people of Rhode Island. Last year, students across the state hosted unauthorized walkouts to call out action against in school gun violence. On February 14, 2018, seventeen people were killed at a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. One month later, students across the state (and nation) gathered outside of their schools for seventeen minutes to honor those seventeen people (Kuffner). Events like these show times of empowerment and the representation of the youth, by the youth. Even if only a small group of students gathered outside, this depiction of the strength we have as the youth of America causes more and more students to bring about change. In March 2017, UN Women hosted a Youth Forum titled, “Youth Create Gender Equality.” This Youth Forum convened “1000 youth leaders and activists from around the world, and produce[d] a Youth Declaration, anchored in the voices and experiences of young people” (“Youth Powering Gender Equality”). The results of this forum were outstanding. These early beginnings of empowerment could later bring even more changes. Everything starts with a spark, a new beginning, that later catches into a flame that ignites the passionate fury that our youth uses as motivation for generations.

Like the butterfly effect, a small change can impact a life far away. If the small high school in South Kingstown created a youth empowerment group, the six students who attended leaving feeling inspired could possibly provoke more change in their future. This newfound passion could bring them to advocate for these causes inducing positive change. These changes could later impact one, ten, or thousands of people, all because of inspiration and motivation brought about at schools. I believe all schools should have an organization like the Youth Empowerment Group to change the world, because it starts with these small town schools to

grow. Imagine, less than ten students per school, statewide, getting together once a week over cookies and soda to discuss today's issues. Imagine that nationwide. Imagine that worldwide. Small steps like these bring change, a reason why we continue as one unified force, fighting for what is right.

### Works Cited

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