

CONNECTED **Excited**
Eye opener **Life-changing**

A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN OF YOUTH LEADING THE CHANGE TO MAKE SCHOOLS SAFE AND INCLUSIVE FOR ALL STUDENTS



The YES! Campaign

Kickoff Conference Report
October 23, 2011

 www.youthsayyes.org

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Powerful Joyful
MOTIVATED
Accepted
LIVELY
ENCOURAGED
understood
HELPFUL
INNOVATIVE
INFORMED
PROACTIVE



A PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR COMMUNITY AND JUSTICE



A Message from NCCJ's Executive Director

For 85 years, the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) has been fighting bias, bigotry, and racism in all its forms. One of today's most pervasive forms is bullying—especially bullying that is related to social identity, such as one's race, ethnicity, perceived or actual sexual orientation, religion, abilities, and class.

Through YES! (Youth Establishing Strength), NCCJ's new youth initiative, we have done something tremendously important and unique. NCCJ gathered hundreds of high school students at the YES! conference to ask THEM what would stop the epidemic of bias-based bullying that overshadows their lives; what their strategies are for addressing bullying in schools; and what resources and assistance they need from adults to create schools that are safe and inclusive for all students.

It is our strong conviction that it is youth and only youth, in collaboration with caring adults, who can and must take the initiative to address and end this epidemic. Here is the report from an incredible day of youth leading the change to end bias-based bullying. I hope it gives you a feel for the amazing energy and brilliant ideas generated by youth at this event. It was their day, and their leadership. It will be their ideas that will make the difference in our schools.

I would like to give a big thanks to Kristen Golden and Muneer Panjwani for their leadership and subsequent follow-up with the YES! Campaign Launch. In addition, a deep thanks to the NCCJ youth leaders and my dedicated staff who lent their talents, time and effort to make this an amazing day for all.

Andrea C. Kandel, Ed.D.

Bullying

The numbers are staggering: Bullying affects 13 million youth annually. More than two thirds of students believe that schools respond poorly to bullying, and a high percentage believe that adult help is infrequent and ineffective. Youth—those who are most directly impacted—have largely been left out of finding solutions to this pervasive issue. The YES! campaign aims to change that.

Bullying affects 13 million youth annually.



Inclusiveness

To be mindful of our surroundings to ensure that each person is made to feel included and to challenge ourselves to join in the work of others.

Conference Goals

GATHER HUNDREDS OF YOUTH LEADERS TO:

- learn from, lead, and inspire each other;
- engage in truthful dialogue around bias-based bullying; and
- brainstorm ideas and youth-led strategies to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive school communities.



YES! CONFERENCE

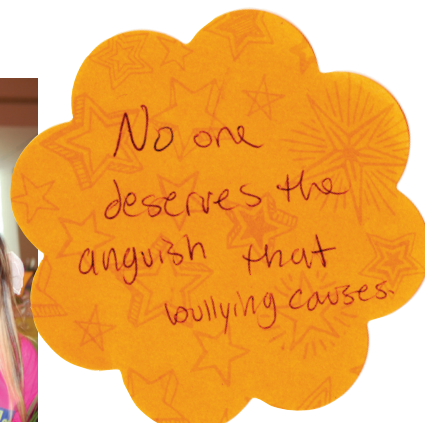
The YES! conference noisily kicked off the campaign on Sunday, October 23, 2011 at the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts as teams of passionate student leaders from CT, MA, and RI gathered to share their ideas and experiences with each other. The YES! Leadership Team sported bright pink shirts, and the participants wore yellow. Youth leaders planned the day, emceed the conference, facilitated the workshops, led the discussions, and performed for their peers. Youth asked the questions and provided the answers. They brainstormed hundreds of ideas and strategies for how they could transform their schools. At the end of the day, they were energized and excited to return to their schools as YES! leaders, ready to lead the change!



Conference Attendees

WHO WAS THERE?

- 256** high school students
- 57** youth leaders
- 35** school advisors
- 21** adult workshop allies
- 31** schools from MA (12), CT (14), and RI (5)



twitter @youthsayyes tweets

@ABullOnParade: At the YES! Conference. The energy is amazing. Something big is goin down right now

@YouthSayYes: Youth MC's Nadia Balogou & Chris Peck are rocking the house, pumping up 350 youth!

GOAL #1

LEARN FROM, LEAD, AND INSPIRE EACH OTHER



YES! Youth Leaders (l. to r.) Shae, Caleb, and Lulu

Designed by youth, for youth, the YES! conference created safe space for teens to share their skills, their truths, and their gifts. Three brave YES! Youth Leaders stood before their peers and asked to be seen as the complex, vulnerable, loving people they are—not the hurtful stereotypes and assumptions others have placed on them.

Shae Sau

Do you remember your first day in high school? Do you remember that random kid who slammed your locker door shut for no reason? Yeah, that was me. But don't just see me as your bully. Because I was once in your shoes.

I was once the the child who was too afraid to speak up when I was teased, threatened, and pushed around; the child whose hair got yanked on so hard I would fall to the ground.

Please don't judge me for the hate I've committed and the compassion I didn't show. Because really, in my heart, I just wanted to feel accepted. I wanted people to laugh at my jokes. I wanted you to be my friend, but didn't know how to say that in words.

Please see all of me. See that I can show my friendliness now; I can show you that at least one person cares. See that my past was just the path to knowledge, accepting, and love for all. Can't you see that I am trying my best to see you? So please look back into my eyes, and my heart, and see ME.

Caleb Wilkie

Please see me as what I am: a brother, a son, a grandson. See me as a hard worker, an honest guy, and someone to lean on if needed. Please do not just see me as the prejudices of being gay—the prejudices are false.

Please do not harass me because I love men. This includes no slurs, no physical violence, no damaging my property, no avoiding me, and please certainly do not kill me.

Please see me as a fun, free-spirited 16-year-old. Please see me as someone with goals. See me as someone who sings in the car. See me as a friend, a linguist, an adventurer, as a traveler. As a human. Please see me as an activist—a youth leader.

Lulu Cruz

The strong woman you see was not always me. The bright, warm personality you feel was not always there. I was the kid alone at lunch, the one you pointed at, laughed at, and whispered, "Why is she alone?"

I was bullied because I was not like the rest. I was bullied because I was not white. But do not pity me, for I got out. I had friends who got me through.

Now I extend my hand, for those who will take it, and become the friend who will always be there. So please see me as me, because I see you. Please see me.



By lunchtime, youth claimed their space and took to the main stage. Slam poets rocked the house, an impromptu dance party broke out, and Kyle Wheelhan led everyone in singing "Lean on Me."

Workshop Highlights

Through powerful youth-led workshops such as *Gender Boxing*, *Break It Down: The Racial Divide*, and *Got Privilege? We All Do*, students began to recognize the ways in which stereotypes, prejudice, and bias are often the basis for bullying. In *Respect: Are You Bringing It?*, participants worked on ways to make sports and physical education safe for everyone, including LGBTQ youth.

SECRETS BOX

People dropped notes into the box, entrusting us with their most private thoughts and fears. "It felt like a gift," said a YES! youth leader. "If in just six hours, we can create a space safe enough that people are sharing stuff they've never shared before, imagine what we can do in a year!"

"I have been called a **whore** and a **slut** for no reason since 8th grade. I have never told anyone this. I had many thoughts of killing myself but just being around people/cheerleading/my family made me realize sometimes I may want that but in the end,

it's not worth it. Now, actually writing this, I feel much better. Thank you for letting me share this confidently without any worry of people at school finding out."

"It hurts my feelings when **people make a joke about how skinny I am.**"

"I've tried to **kill myself** a few times."

"In my freshman year, another athlete told me '**gay people don't play sports.**' I am now a senior and a gay athlete. I'm an athletic recruit at every one of the schools to which I am applying."

Words cut deeper than any physical wound could ever cut.

next time I see someone alone or upset I'll be the person to go up to them and show I care.

It shouldn't have to take courage to be who you are...

Not everyone's appearance is a direct reflection of how they feel.



Trust

To have faith in ourselves and others; to hold each of us in a safe space where we feel free to be who we are without the threat of humiliation, embarrassment, or harassment.



@youthsayyes tweets

@YouthSayYes: "We are not small or weaker people. We are mountains of various sizes!" - Jamele Adams, Keynote poet

@YouthSayYes: Everyone is pulling out their phones, setting statuses & tweeting about the #YesConference. So Stellar!

GOAL #2

TRUTHFUL DIALOGUE AROUND BULLYING

Youth appreciated the opportunity to talk truthfully about the realities and complexities of bullying behavior. They didn't talk about rules, consequences, or labels—often the focus in schools. They talked about how it felt to be excluded, how they had done things they weren't proud of, how they hadn't realized the impact of their words or actions, and how grateful they were to the youth who shared their stories.



the cafeteria is a battleground

people often can be both suffering and cruel to one another at the same time how everyone struggles

Workshop Highlights

All schools reported that LGBT students, those who look different, and students with special needs were frequent targets of bullying. Youth learned to understand, appreciate, and celebrate the differences that make us unique in workshops such as *That's So Gay!*, *The Ins and Outs of Cliques*, and *We Fit! Just Differently*, which focused on autism. More than 85% of youth with autism—a disorder that impairs social interaction—are bullied.

Targets

- People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender
- People who dress different
 - Socially awkward
 - People with mental disabilities
 - Girls who are perceived to be "whores"
 - Freshmen
 - Physically different
 - Kids with special needs
 - Smart, quiet kids
 - Minorities
 - The kids who try too hard to be accepted
 - Immigrant students
 - People who look different
 - People who don't fit in the mold
 - Nerds or weird people
 - People who are not straight or white
 - Shy people
 - Non-English speakers
 - Fat people
 - Religion (Christian, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim)
 - Physically different
 - Males sexually harassing females
 - Lower socioeconomic class
 - Students who aren't popular.



Nonviolence

To challenge ourselves to seek out nonviolent ways to deal with conflict and to learn and understand that being nonviolent requires more courage and has more power to have a lasting positive impact.



Bullying is not a rite of passage.

The pain of not being included lasts forever.

FOR REAL

In small groups, participants had an honest open dialogue on their experiences with unsafe and safe school cultures, and with being excluded and included. What does it feel like? How do we build cultures of inclusion?

Exclusion

When people whisper	Conversation stops when you walk in	Rumors, gossip	Smirk	Faking texts
Being ignored and inside jokes	When your ideas aren't taken seriously	Act like you are invisible	Betrayed	Misunderstood
Being left out at a lunch table	Uncomfortable/awkward	Broken friendships	Hurt	Angry
People telling you to your face you aren't wanted	What's wrong with me?	When everyone gets up and leaves	Want to die/suicidal	Head banging
Like you aren't good enough	Getting slammed on Facebook	You do things you are uncomfortable with	Mortified	Insecurities
Being pointed out and laughed at	Not being invited to a party	Act like you're someone else	Humiliated	Vulnerable
		Private Facebook groups	Powerless	Low self-esteem
			Afraid	Taunted
			Silent	Cold, sarcastic remarks
			Hated	Ignored
			Ignored	Hollow inside
			No self-worth	Trying too hard
			Shut down or out	Rejected

Inclusion

Positive interactions	You feel good, comfortable	The "wassup?" nod	Warm and fuzzy
Laugh with people, happy with each other	You can be yourself	Loved	Empowered
Recognizing everyone's difference	Trust them with your feelings	Worthy	Valuable
Warm first impression/greeting	Feel good about yourself	Invited	Supported
Everyone has your back	People listen when you talk	Equal	Genuine
You can let go and say what you want without being judged.	You have a say in what will happen	Hugs, smiles	Free/strong
	Mentioned on Twitter	Special	Appreciated
	Wanted	Safe	Involved
		Positive	Honesty
		Confident	Important/I matter
		Respected	Elation

I am more powerful than those who talk about me.



@youthsayyes tweets

@YouthSayYes: Feeling confident there will be 100's of ppl sayin YES! to challenge the NO's we hear every day.

@ABullOnParade: #YesConference is amazing right now. If you're not saying YES, then what ARE you saying?

GOAL #3

BRAINSTORM IDEAS AND YOUTH-LED STRATEGIES TO CREATE SAFE, WELCOMING, AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

The youth responded enthusiastically to being celebrated, encouraged, and supported, and looked forward to bringing this youth-empowerment spirit back to their schools. Their confidence and excitement were reflected in their strategies and solutions, many of which expressed the desire to be trusted with the responsibility to lead the change in their schools.



Workshop Highlights

The workshops *Say What? Training Active Bystanders*, *Talk the Talk*, and *Everyday Leaders* imparted practical skills to youth. In the popular workshop, *What Would You Do?*, a talented high school troupe performed improv skits, acting out the emotions around real-life situations that happen in schools. Audience members came up with the scenarios, and a few even volunteered to come onstage. The results were personal and powerful, as youth witnessed familiar scenes and worked together to figure out better outcomes.

Genuine Allies

Team advisors had a lively facilitated dialogue on handling incidents of bullying, ways adults can support youth, and how to be allies to youth leaders. The upshot? They would like training around bias-based bullying; to learn how to intervene without escalating the situation; and to figure out how to fit a youth-empowered model into a top-down institution.



Strategy Party!

IDENTIFYING YOUTH-LED STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

After a half day of exploring what creates a safe school, it was time to identify youth-led strategies and solutions. Youth brainstormed ideas on index cards and then, with music blasting, raced around the room exchanging cards. When the music stopped, they turned to a nearby person and discussed the merits of the strategies they were holding. Five rounds later, hundreds of ideas had passed through their collective hands. Poring through all of these solutions after the conference, the following key themes emerged.

Peer Power

Students want to look out for others in their schools. Mentor programs were a popular strategy for students to be able to take on that responsibility, to ensure that every student has a connection with another student, and to help engage those who are most often excluded.

Talk It Out

Students are eager to have regular opportunities during the school day to talk honestly about diversity and difference. They would especially like the topics of bias-based bullying, social identities, and social justice integrated into school culture and curriculum through courses, advisory groups, and in-school programs and initiatives.

Building Bridges

Youth would love informal, safe spaces to really get to know people from other groups and cliques whose paths they would not otherwise cross (in a positive way). They appreciated hearing diverse perspectives and experiences, and

found that it helped to dispel stereotypes. They would like this replicated in their schools.

Culture Shift

Youth expressed a desire to simply and immediately change the way students interact with each other, beginning with themselves. They suggested a number of ways to promote and celebrate positive, kind, and inclusive behaviors and make them the new cultural norm.

Adult Education

Youth want adults to believe in their abilities and strengths, rather than operate from a fear-based or punitive framework. They want to be confident that adults understand how complicated bullying situations can be, and to trust that they know how to keep incidents from escalating or having unintended consequences. Students recommend training for teachers, staff, and administrators on these issues, as well as on how adults can support and empower youth to take leadership.

I felt the Love from all the people, and their hearts opening up.

I'm learning that my actions can effect people more than I realize.

I learned that none of us are alone in this struggle

I am so motivated to bring this spirit back to my school!



INCCJ
VALUE

Compassion To reach out and show a deep level of sympathy for the struggles of others and recognize the power of human emotions to heal and transform experiences of pain to those of courage.



@youthsayyes tweets

@erindinorksftw: what an incredible day full of youth leadership and empowerment! #YouthSayYES #antibullying

@YouthSayYes: Everybody found their buddy? #youthonlyactivity #peaceoutadults #safespace

MOVING FORWARD

The YES! Conference was a unique endeavor that successfully encouraged and enabled hundreds of youth to tell their truths—about bullying, what makes them feel safe and unsafe, their visions for inclusive schools, and how they would make those visions a reality. This report reflects an unprecedented collection of youth voices and ideas, and gives adults a remarkable opportunity to listen and learn. As The YES! Campaign develops out of the ideas we learned from the youth, we invite you to join us to create safe and inclusive school communities everywhere.

Connect with NCCJ and The YES! Campaign

The YES! Book: A fun, engaging, and educational curriculum for youth and adults to empower school communities to be more safe and inclusive. The Book will be available by June 2012.

Youth Empowerment: NCCJ offers two award-winning youth programs that educate and empower youth to create positive communities. BRIDGES is a two-day in-school youth leadership program and ANYTOWN is a residential summer program focusing on building communities free of bias and bigotry.

Professional Development: NCCJ works with numerous school districts to educate faculty on ways to identify and fight bias in classrooms as well as how to be effective allies to youth. NCCJ can customize trainings to meet schools' specific needs.

Workshop Series: NCCJ hosts regular workshops for youth-serving community leaders and organizations to learn effective strategies for building youth-led communities.

visit www.nccj.org for more information

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Conference Highlights

AT THE END OF THE DAY, WHAT DID YOUTH PARTICIPANTS SAY?

88% agree it was important for them to talk about the strengths and challenges at their school.

95% agree that their thoughts and ideas were valued, heard, and respected by others.

91% agree that they learned many ideas that they can use to make their school safe and inclusive.

88% agree that their ideas and opinions will contribute to building the YES! campaign.

99% feel energized and excited to be a YES! leader in their school.



THE YES! YOUTH LEADERSHIP TEAM A shout out to the youth leaders who poured their hearts, minds, and souls into creating and running the amazing YES! conference. These emPOWERed youth will lead the change. Believe in YOUth!

A Call to Action: Get Started Now!

Engage Youth in decision-making that affects their social environment. This offers them opportunities for taking responsibility.

Start a YES! Club whose mission is to evaluate the school environment and take proactive steps to bring youth together in celebration of differences.

Put up "The Box"! Encourage youth to share their stories and feelings anonymously as a means to understand the reality of their experiences at the school.

Start Talking! Get youth in small groups to talk about the strengths and challenges of your school. Celebrate the strengths and engage them in overcoming the challenges.

Celebrate! Identify youth and adults who are taking positive actions and celebrate them publicly.

Mingle! Provide opportunities for youth from different grades, backgrounds, and social groups to mingle through a common goal such as a volunteer day, fundraiser, creating school spirit, or a mural project.

Explore The YES! Campaign website (www.youthsayyes.org) to find youth stories to share with your school, encourage students to blog for YES!, watch videos or make your own!

Say YES! Encourage young people's idealism and passions by providing resources for them to actualize their ideas. Saying YES! is a commitment, so mean it when you say it.



Respect To honor and hold in a high esteem, the qualities and abilities of each individual.



Open-hearted AWESOME
Epic Amazingness

THEY SAID YES!



NEWMAN'S OWN[®]
FOUNDATION



TRAVELERS 



AMAZING
HAPPY Inspired
ENERGETIC
Enlightened
FANTASTIC
REFRESHING



The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) was founded in 1927 as the National Conference of Christians and Jews. NCCJ is a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry and racism and promoting understanding and respect among all races, religions and cultures through education, advocacy and conflict resolution.

CONTACT US (860)683-1039 OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.NCCJ.ORG