



LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

**YOUNG WOMEN
WHO HAVE
LIVED INJUSTICE
KNOW HOW TO
SHAPE CHANGE.**

I AM WHY. YOUNG WOMEN
LEAD THE WAY TO JUSTICE



I am that BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE
charged as an adult at 17 yrs old.
COURTS did not see me as a CHILD

I AM WHY
young women & girls
will ORGANIZE

Lucy H

MEET LUCERO, A NATURAL LEADER

“My first contact with the system, I was 15 years old. . . . I remember the judge saying, ‘You’re a leader in your gang.’ That’s really bad. . . . Makes me feel like I can’t be a leader, period. But here I am, being a leader in my community, not with a gang, but a leader, a role model, someone you could talk to, someone that you could come up to and be like, ‘Hey, hey, sis, I need this help. What do you think about this? What is your suggestion?’ I feel like I became that organizer in my community. I was born a natural leader.”

– Lucero

SEEING THE POSITIVE, FROM STRENGTHS TO OUTCOMES

Emphasizing the strengths of a young person instead of focusing on her deficits is at the core of the positive youth development (PYD) approach. When strengths are recognized and nurtured, a young person's well-being and ability to thrive are increased. Especially for youth who are experiencing oppression, the PYD approach can lead to a positive sense of self, competency, political efficacy and healthy behaviors.

The system saw Lucero as just a leader of a gang, instead of a young person with the ability to be a leader. By seeing only her deficits instead of her strengths, the system failed to help a young Lucero recognize her own leadership abilities and the positive impact she could make within her community.

“They tried to do anything in their power to make me feel like I didn’t have a voice.”

– Lucero

CONTRIBUTING LEADS TO LEARNING AND HEALING

Building on Richard Lerner's 5 C's of positive youth development (competence, confidence, character, connection and caring) can lead to a 6th C: Contributions – to self, family, community and civil society. With the opportunity to contribute comes the opportunities to learn how to build positive relationships with adults and engage in activities that teach important life skills. What's more, when a young person sees that she can positively contribute to society and help lead the way to addressing the oppressive forces impacting her and her community, healing is possible.

“When the Young Women’s Freedom Center came inside juvenile hall and actually let me facilitate, it was . . . a good feeling. Like, ‘Damn, they hella believe in me’”

- Lucero



SOCIAL ACTIVISM THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WORKS WITH OPPRESSED YOUTH BY:



Providing a connection to causes that are meaningful to them



Creating a forum for organizing, collective strength and coalition building



Building a community of sisters who share a common cause



Making opportunities available in the community to lead social change



Offering a path to healing

YOUTH AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

The social justice youth development (SJYD) perspective builds on other youth development models by taking into consideration the social problems and conditions faced by oppressed youth. This developmental approach sees youth not just as assets but also as agents of change – capable not only of developing a resiliency to their toxic environments, but transforming them. Instead of being objects of policy, youth are participants who possess the ability to actually shape policy.

LUCERO: ADVOCATE. LEADER. WARRIOR.

“I wanna advocate for young women, I wanna do so much. . . . I just feel like my mom tells me in my heart, ‘Continue to do this and you’ll get your answer. You’ll feel the way you’re gonna feel, but you’re gonna be at peace ‘cause you . . . fought in the fight.’ . . . I put all my hurt and my pain into this. . . . I wanna see our women and girls not in jail, not in the system, not in foster care, but a safe home.”

– Lucero

PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

CREATING A FORUM FOR ORGANIZING, COLLECTIVE STRENGTH AND COALITION BUILDING

Young Women's Freedom Center
Sister Warriors and the Young
Women's Freedom Coalition
San Francisco, CA
youngwomenfree.org

Young Women United Circle of Strength
Albuquerque, NM
youngwomenunited.org

EMPLOYING RESEARCH AS MEANS OF ACTIVISM

Young Women's Empowerment Project
Chicago, IL
youarepriceless.org

Young Women's Freedom Center
San Francisco, CA
youngwomenfree.org

USING COMMUNITY ASSET-MAPPING AS MEANS OF ACTIVISM

Southern Poverty Law Center
and Alabama Youth Justice Alliance
Montgomery, AL
splcenter.org

Center for Court Innovation
Youth Justice Board Training
New York, NY
courttinnovation.org

ENGAGING YOUNG WOMEN IN CAUSES THAT ARE MEANINGFUL TO THEM

Young Women United
Albuquerque, NM
youngwomenunited.org

My Life My Choice Leadership Corps
Boston, MA
fightingexploitation.org

Freedom Forward and Young Women's
Freedom Center Forward Fellows Program
San Francisco, CA
youngwomenfree.org

Brotherhood/Sister Sol
Environmental Program
New York, NY
brotherhood-sistersol.org

CREATING PHYSICAL SPACE FOR SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Youth Justice Coalition
Chuco's Justice Center
youth4justice.org

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COMMUNITY FOR YOUNG WOMEN TO LEAD SOCIAL CHANGE

Young Women's Freedom Center
San Francisco, CA
youngwomenfree.org

Young Women United
Albuquerque, NM
youngwomenunited.org

Communities United for
Restorative Youth Justice
Oakland, CA
curyj.org

Youth Justice Coalition
Los Angeles, CA
youth4justice.org

Juveniles for Justice,
Juvenile Law Center,
Philadelphia, PA
jlc.org

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG WOMEN TO FIND HEALING THROUGH SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Urban Peace Movement
Oakland, CA
urbanpeacemovement.org

Flourish Agenda
Oakland, CA
flourishagenda.com

For examples of these and other solutions at work see IAmWhy.org

“I already had a strong voice.
We have a strong voice. It’s
all about developing that
voice in a positive way.”

– Lucero

I AM WHY. YOUNG WOMEN LEAD THE WAY TO JUSTICE

I Am Why brings young women activists together with researchers and other allies to advance a vision of equitable and just systems that provide opportunity and better serve the needs of young women. Those in the field are invited to use *I Am Why* communications tools, which connect young women's strengths and stories to policies, practices and programs that work.

IAmWhy.org.

**NoVo
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