

Engaging Youth in Community Advocacy

Suzanne Ramazani D.O. PGY-2

University of Rochester Golisano Children's Hospital
in partnership with the Hoekelman Center and Joseph C. Wilson Magnet High School



INTRODUCTION

“Advocacy has the potential to shape or change policy in a way that can impact the health of thousands, if not millions, of people” (Galer-Unti, Tappe & Lachenmayer, 2004, p. 287).

Meaningful youth engagement leads to optimal youth development and acts as a catalyst for system changes. The literature points to the importance of using youth-centered approaches to build positive relationships between young people and their communities (2, 3, 4).

Advocacy opportunities influence young people's beliefs and impact their attitudes on health and behavior (5). If young people are given the opportunity to positively engage with their community, they are empowered to take part in policy-based decisions as adults (6).

GOALS

- Increase self-confidence
- Increase sense of belonging
- Decrease risky behaviors

OBJECTIVES

- Collaborate with subset of students at Wilson High School's International Baccalaureate (IB) Program
- Engage Rochester students in community advocacy initiatives and civic leadership
- Provide students the opportunity to learn about and speak on issues affecting them and their local community
- Partner with community leaders and provide students the tools they need to become active influences to create meaningful system changes
- Empower students to advocate for themselves and their community
- Report back to other students about their experiences

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. **“What's the problem?”** - Identify issues affecting the local Rochester community at large. Meet with subset of students from Wilson High School's IB program on a near-weekly basis.
2. **“What can be done?”** - Discuss ideas and research topics.
3. **“How can WE solve it?”** - Engage community leaders and advisors, motivate and encourage students and community partners to participate in initiative (for many high school students, advocacy projects count as their volunteer service hours).
4. **“Taking Action”** - Implement the initiative within the community!



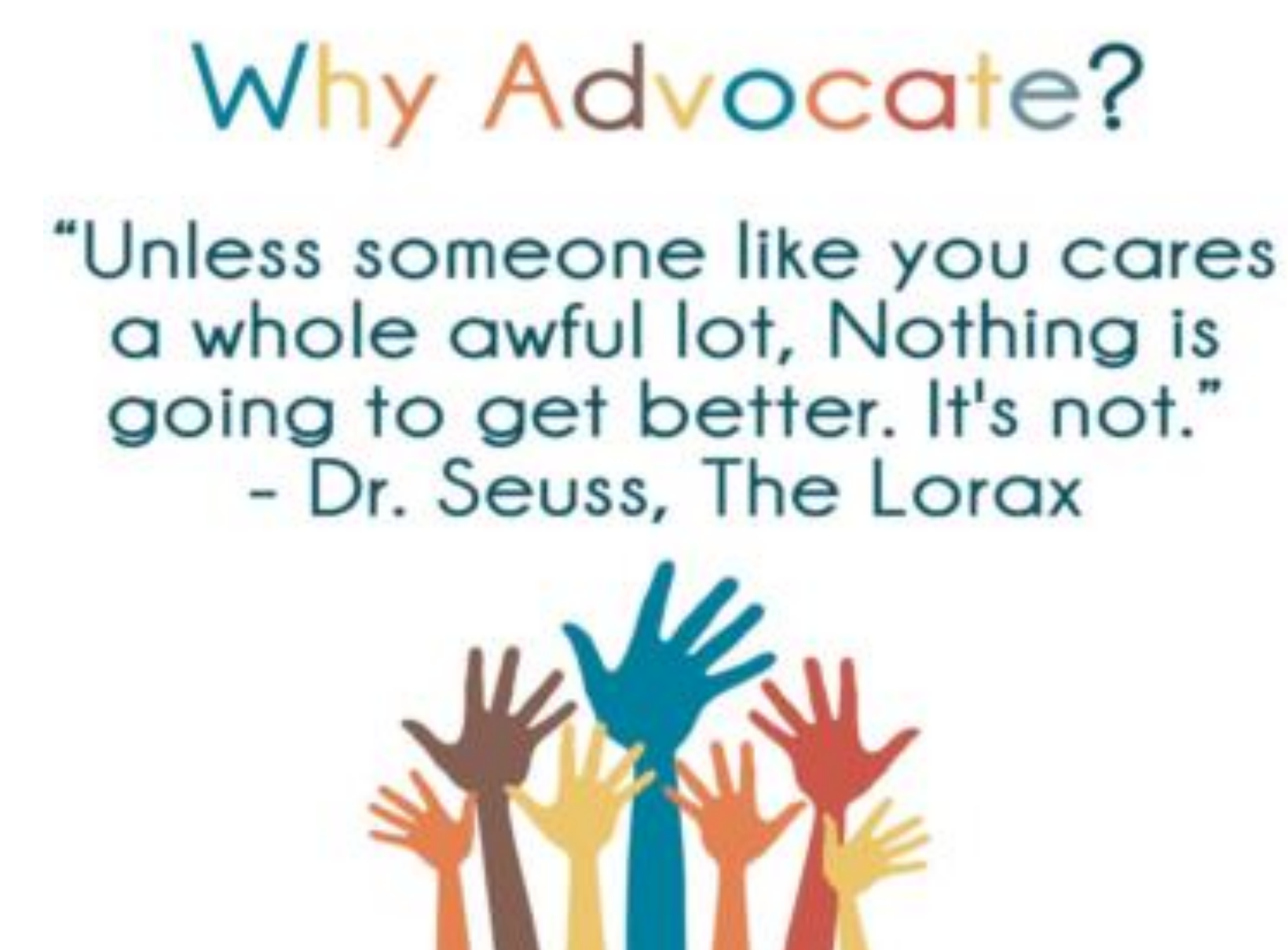
Celebrating a recent donation of toiletry items!



Examples of toiletry item donations!

RESULTS

- Successfully initiated *the Wilson Wildcat Closet*, where clothing and toiletry items are accessible to Rochester high school students in need
- Partnered with the National Council of Jewish Women in the Greater Rochester Section on the P.A.D project initiative (Providing Access and Dignity to women and girls during their monthly cycle) to provide education on women's menstrual cycles and organize “kit parties”
- Advocate for teachers and students affected by the budgetary crisis in Rochester
- Initiate a food drive at Wilson High School to collect items for donation to local food pantries



CONCLUSIONS

By partnering Rochester students with community leaders and engaging them in local advocacy initiatives, students at Wilson High School created positive changes within their community. They learned the value of civic leadership and the impact their voice can have.

Providing opportunities for youth to actively participate in social change may help them carry these skills into adulthood. Young people are part of their community and can become part of the solution to its problems (6, 7).

REFERENCES

1. Galer-Unti, R. A., Tappe, M. K., & Lachenmayer, S. (2004). Advocacy 101: Getting Started in Health Education Advocacy. *Health Promotion Practice*, 5(3), 280-288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839903257697>
2. Yoshitaka Iwasaki (2016) The role of youth engagement in positive youth development and social justice youth development for high-risk, marginalised youth, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21:3, 267-278, DOI: [10.1080/02673843.2015.1067893](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2015.1067893)
3. Alicea, S., Pardo, G., Conover, K., Gopalan, G., & McKay, M. (2012). Step-up: Promoting youth mental health and development in inner-city high schools. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 40, 175-186. [10.1007/s10615-011-0344-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-011-0344-3)
4. Ersing, R. L. (2009). Building the capacity of youths through community cultural arts: A positive youth development perspective. *Best Practice in Mental Health*, 5, 26-43.
5. Winkleby, M. A., Feighery, E., Dunn, M., Kole, S., Ahn, D., Killen, J. (2004). Effects of an advocacy intervention to reduce smoking among teenagers. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*, 158, 269-275.
6. Thackeray, R. and Hunter, M. (2010), Empowering Youth: Use of Technology in Advocacy to Affect Social Change. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 15: 575-591. doi:[10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01503.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01503.x)
7. Finlayson, John. “Youth advocacy.” Accessed 17 Jan 2020. <https://aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/proceedings/download/s/09-finlayson.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- IB program junior high school students, Wilson High School
- Julie VanDerwater - principal, Wilson High School
- Gina Horowitz - co-chair, P.A.D. project
- Jill DelVecchio - social worker, Eastman School of Dentistry
- Karen Black - public relations, Eastman School of Dentistry

Special thanks to

- Andrew Aligne - director, The Hoekelman Center
- Kelly McDermott - community liaison, The Hoekelman Center