Youth Action Insight - Five Days In The Life Of A Young Activist

August 22, 2012 By Larry Bryant

This summer in D.C. with the buzz of the International AIDS Conference not yet settled, more than a dozen young people - between the ages of 21-29 - came together for the 2012 Campaign To End AIDS Youth Action Institute (YAI).

Youth organized and youth led with support from adults (yes, old people like me), the eighth year of YAI seeks to educate and inspire a generation vulnerable to a disease they often know little about. Many times though, I am inspired by the insight, creativity, energy, and passion that these young people bring to AIDS activism.

Below is the day to day journal from one of this year's participants Rickey 'Rico' Robinson and with his permission, I share it with you.

Day 1: The opening day many of the YAI participants arrived to D.C. from places all around the globe like Texas, Haiti, Detroit, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Ghana, amongst others and all met up by nigh time over a quiet dinner. The quietness didn't last too long because we got more hyped up when the time to introduce our selves and what we do came around. Some people were students, some work at health clinics, youth groups, aids foundations, and many other organizations but the one thing everyone had is common was the passion for what they do which made it easier for us all to become instantly close. After discussing what C2EA and YAI were really about it made the start of our project move a lot faster. We were told that we needed to agree to one issue that we want to research, take action and advocate for. We started to think!

Day 2: Hello 2nd day! Up bright and early and ready to leave our housing venue by 9! This was the day of presentations and I mean we sat and listened to some great informational pieces. It started with Sarah Audelo from "Advocates for Youth" who gave a nice presentation on youth statistics of people living with HIV, strategies to solve the problem, and why young people are having improper sex today especially in the D.C. area. We learned that the sex health educators in school don't know how to correctly teach the students and need more training. We also began to learn some of the top issues in the city like needle exchange, youth friendly services, and Metro Teen Aids. After this it was munch time, which ran into more presentations from Housing Works staff about standing up and taking "Direct Action" for issues we believe in and that need to be changed for

the better. Some of the direct action could include starting petitions, getting arrested, rallying, and writing letters to city officials. The power point presentation led by Larry Bryant was an eye opener for us to see such passionate history being made.

Another presentation that many participants felt was so enthusiastic was from a 16 year old role model and leader Amirah Sequeira from the “Student Global Aids Campaign” who basically rejuvenated our energy educating us on the “TPP” and how the pharmacies out there are teaming up with the government to end drugs and meds for HIV+ people when they should be doing the opposite. She taught us about how these people have power but we have just as much power to put an end to aids by voting and agreeing to the Robin Hood Tax on Wall-Street which could give billions of dollars to the cure for aids. This presentation opened up many eyes and left us taunting her for business cards.

Other presentations that day included a media training presentation by Kenyon Farrow which would help us as a group with our project, Pete who has a popular radio and television show, and Erika from Puerto Rico who was passionate about educating us on the transgender community in Puerto Rico and how they have no support that is highly needed.

Day 3: The day of field trips! We started off by going further into D.C. to visit [Transgender Health Empowerment (T.H.E.), Inc.] where we sat in a phenomenal presentation held by Debbie and Brian who currently run the program. They told us the issues in the transgender community, why they become sex workers, get HIV, denied accepted, and how they provide housing and resume building, testing, and more to help the transgender community save their lives and turn them around. We got the history on the transgender community and learned things that we never knew. Funding was one of the biggest issues that could also solve some of there problems. Debbie did such a great job she became the next Lady Gaga amongst us wanting photo ops and autographs from her.

Next stop was The Covenant House and we got a nice tour of the building and why the Catholic Church made them. They were established to service runaway kids, homeless youth, and to help improve there lives by receiving life skill training, cooking classes, and entertainment outlets like making music and film production. It was a great place and the group had plenty of questions for the rep.

After the tours we got we got back to our building where we had a debrief and debate and struggled to choose and vote on the issue the majority of the group wanted to take direct action for. We had a tie between the Robin Hood Tax and More funding for the Transgender community. We voted again and our topic became getting more funding for the transgender community and support from Mayor Gray. Certain member’s felt really connected with this community and really wanted to be the voice for them. Once our topic was chosen we decided to split into groups of three including media, linguistics, and outreach. We got our plan together to make transgender demonstration boards, petitions, contact news channels, papers, create media releases, call organizations, promote, and go to city hall to make noise and look as official as possible to support.

Day 4: Down to business! The day of clash. Linguistics went shopping for materials, outfits, and created demonstrations. They were out all day getting tools, while media contacted ultimately 200 media outlets, wrote a media/press release, made pamphlets, and created a petition to get as much support as we could, and outreach contacted other organizations for support and to collaborate with us and get the word out about our call 2 action. In the midst of all this work we did in one day to plan an event, peoples emotions got in the way, last minute changes were made, many disagreements happened, some members cried, some stormed out the room upset, and it became hard for everybody to work as a team. But at the end of the day it all came together even with all the stress because we knew what mattered the most was helping to get the transgender community funds and equal rights.

Day 5: Lets go team! Up and out at the City Hall by 11am protesting and making noise. 3 members went inside City Hall making sure that every council member was aware of the protest outside, getting there stance, and delivering demands while the rest of the group attracted media attention from news channels, government officials, loud and proudly screaming chants like “In the land of the free, I’m not free to be me,” “transfer, trans-funds,” and others while supporters came out and watched and even participated in the march. This march took longer then an hour on a very hot day and we all felt great about it even while getting tired! The job was done and done well. The feedback was great.

We then went over to an organization called HIPS and were taken on a tour of the facility, meeting some transgender women, who gave phenomenal presentations like Paula who had a life changing story, and made us all feel appreciative of them because they shared life changing stories about the struggle of a transgender and what we didn’t know. This all happened over amazing Jamaican food that left our tummies full! The group exchanged tons of hugs and kisses with the HIPS organization because they said we inspired them to stand up more for their own community seeing us actually do it.

The ending of our night consisted of celebrating over dinner with Mr. Larry Bryant himself and the team who made it all happen. Many new friendships were established, better understandings were made, lives were affected, and young people became even better advocates! A new family was created and we helped to become another voice for the transgender community for the better!

“In the land of the free, I’m not free to be me”

His name is Rickey Robinson but known to most people as “Rico”. He was born in Oakland, California being raised in the bay area up until he graduated high school in 2006. He always had a passion for helping others growing up, reading magazines, music, and having fun. He went to Berkeley High School, which offered many different clubs and opportunities on campus that kept him busy on and off campus.

When he entered high school one of the first opportunities he took advantage of was the position to become a “Teen Tobacco Prevention Health Educator,” which required him to study and teach tobacco prevention to local youth earning him the “2006 Leadership Award” presented by the

Alameda County Tobacco Control Coalition. He also served as an active member on the "Oakland Youth Commission," as a youth representative for Mayor Jerry Brown contributing to rebuilding the youth community in the city from 2004-2006. One of the biggest opportunities he was given was the chance to go to Morelia, Mexico summer of 2005 and help rebuild their community and teach Mexican citizens video production and the English language living with a host family as an exchange student.

He moved to Los Angeles in 2006 to attend college at Cal State University- Northridge, majoring in Journalism. He found a passion for entertainment becoming a journalist for magazines and assistant to stars like Lil' Wayne, Brandy, Monica, LisaRaye, Alicia Keys, Snoop Dogg and more at shows like BET, MTV, Billboard, Grammys, and Peoples Choice Awards starting in 2007. He attended Florida International University in Miami as well for studies and returned to Los Angeles in 2009 where he resides and is currently juggling his passion for entertainment and going back to his roots for advocating starting with the Campaign 2 End Aids and Youth Action Institute, hoping to save communities all over the world as he approaches graduation soon!

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