

Mental Health Campaign (MHC) Program Summary

YWP Mission: The Young Women's Project (YWP) builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can transform DC institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. YWP programs engage youth on three levels – **as organizers** (educating, engaging, mobilizing their peers, working as teams to make decisions), **as advocates** (presenting testimony to city Council, convening accountability meetings of Agency leaders, developing and passing policies) and **as system rebuilders** (developing programs, creating new peer-led systems, integrating youth into decision making). Our work engages under-resourced BIPOC youth ages 14-21 from all DC Wards and most public high schools. The vast majority of our youth identify as women, 20% identify as LGBTQ. Last year, we hired and trained 251 young people from 25 DC public and charter schools; half of our youth live or go to school in wards 5, 7 and 8. Founded in 1994 as a Collective, YWP has a staff of 6 adults and 100 youth and a budget of \$535,000. We are value-driven, anti-racist, feminist, grounded in youth development and partnership, and work every day to dismantle oppression and rebuild institutions.

YWP Program: YWP has built a citywide network membership of hundreds of youth educators and advocates in all wards and most schools, united behind a shared vision of youth progress and positive health outcomes. YWP's work is organized into two program areas, driven by long-term-system-change-focused goals. The *Youth Health Educator Program (YHEP)* develops youth as sexual health advocates who work to reduce DC's unintended teenage pregnancy and STI rates through peer education, resource provision, and clinic referral initiation. Last year we engaged 121 youth advocates who reached 11,000 peers. Working in partnership with DCPS and DC Health, YHEP educators earn \$10-16 an hour, work 4-6 hours a week, and receive 75+ hours of training in sexual health, self-advocacy, peer education, social media, and life skills that includes 25 hours of Adulthood Preparation Subjects (APS). Peer educators are integrated into classroom health education, serve as resources for school-based health centers, and assist community based clinics with outreach. *In the seven years of this program, we employed 1,225 youth who reached 40,381 of their peers, distributed 529,053 condoms and made 14,208 clinic referrals. IN 2022, YHEP youth educators from 6 schools created Sexual Education Center – Virtual Wellness ([SEC-VWCs](#)) that provide comprehensive sexual health information, resources, and services.*

The Youth Justice Campaign (YJC) develops youth as advocates and organizers to advance a bold agenda and leverage their power through collective action to improve rights, resources, and accountability for DC youth. YJC campaign teams: 1) Define annual campaign priorities; 2) Collect and analyze data; 3) Engage, educate, and mobilize youth members through training and social media; and 4) Work with DC policy makers to create and implement policies. Youth staff work 5-6 hours a week, develop a portfolio of products, build cross-neighborhood friendships, earn \$10-15/hr and receive more than 150 hours of training on public policy, data collection, social media and community organizing. *The Mental Health Campaign (MHC) is part of this work.*

Driven by the Covid-19 emergency and rising rates of already high depression and suicide among DC youth, YJC youth staff launched the **Mental Health Campaign (MHC)** in 2020 to strengthen school-based mental health programming, reduce stigma, connect youth to services, and expand access to mental health education. This year we have 80 youth advocates working on mental health in 16 schools. ([YJC Staff bios here](#)) Youth Advocates work 4-6 hours a week, develop a portfolio of products, build cross-school friendships, earn \$10-16/hr and receive more than 100 hours of training. YWP's mental health-wellness curriculum includes a deep examination of the causes and effects of stress, toxic stress, trauma, resilience-building, and the brain science behind it. Each youth educator will specialize in a range of wellness skills and strategies that will be shared through Virtual Wellness Centers and as part of school-based health education. Youth Advocates are paid as part of the DOES School-Year Internship Program (SYIP).

In November we designed and distributed the [2022-23 Youth Mental Health Survey](#), which was taken by 673 youth so far. We will be sharing our [Preliminary Results](#) today. In Spring 2023 Youth Advocates will be meeting with school-based and agency leaders to share survey findings, discuss [mental health solutions](#), including state-level models they've gathered. In February and March, we will be collecting details on high school mental health infrastructure in our new Checklist for Change Project. Last year, YJC youth leaders presented more than [45 testimonies](#) to DC Council, educated more than 4,000 peers, and in April 2022 launched [Student On-line Support \(SOS\) Virtual Wellness Centers](#) in 13 schools. Developed by youth for youth using the Google slides and Bitmoji application, VWCs provide interactive tools that support students to examine the impact of stress, toxic stress, and trauma and build resilience through relationship building, meditation, exercise, nutritional healing, self-care, self-agency, and other wellness practices. YWP youth leaders share their VWC link via their Linktrees, social media posts, email, text message, and in classroom presentations. *YWP's SOS centers are the only consistent source of on line education and resources available to DCPS and DCPSC students.*

YJC adult and youth staff work closely and rigorously with school and agency leaders at DBH, DCPS, and DCPSC -- although our work is not *officially endorsed by any agency*. Most notably, we are working with the DBH Community of Practice, run by CHHCS ([Center for Health and Health Care In Schools](#)), to run a Youth Adult Partnership Working Group YWP youth staff launched the **Mental Health Campaign (MHC)** in 2019 to strengthen school-based mental health programming, connect youth to services, and expand access to mental health education. Since then, MHC has trained and engaged 90 youth leaders who educated more than 2,300 peers on mental health, presented [45 testimonies](#) to the DC Council, created and distributed 2 [Youth Mental Health Surveys](#) (2021 & 2022), developed [mental health solutions](#), and most recently created [Student On-line Support \(SOS\) Virtual Wellness Centers](#) in 13 schools which provided interactive wellness resources and connected 2,300 youth to counselors and clinicians. Their work was featured recently in the [Washington Post](#). This work was accomplished through partnerships with leaders in the Department of Behavioral Health and DCPS Office of Student Engagement, the Center for Health and Health Care in Schools (where YWP helped launch the Youth Adult Partnership Working Group), Child Trends (where our youth served as research advisors), and 24 DC public high schools.

Organizational Milestones: Since 1994, YWP has developed more than 7,000 youth leaders and has worked in partnership with a number of DC agencies to develop policy and implement programs in sexual health education and services, foster care rights and opportunities, youth employment, and other issues. On the health policy front, we drafted and guided passage of the DC Health Education Standards (Approved 4.1.16 for an 8.16 implementation), working closely with the State Board of Education, DC Public Schools (DCPS), and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Specifying concepts and skills that students need to know and do, from pre-K through 12th grade, standards are used to develop curriculum and professional development, inform teacher lesson plans and instruction, and monitor student progress. Since 2010, YWP employed and engaged more than 250 foster youth who advocated to secure several rights and resources for DC foster youth through the passage of the Foster Youth Rights and Responsibilities Amendment Act of 2012), which details 40 rights in education, privacy, health, transportation, and other issues. Youth leaders successfully advocated for a \$1,464 a year clothing voucher, a \$100 monthly mandatory allowance, and annual increases in independent living stipends. From 2.2017 to 9.2019, YWP ran the Center for Young Adults, provided training and support to more than 150 emancipating youth —connecting them to jobs (57%) and housing (68%). In 2020, YWP worked with Committee on Labor and Workforce Development to create part-time work opportunities and career supports for high school students. Launched in January 2021 and expanded in 2022, the [DOES School-Year Internship Program \(SYIP\)](#) provides year-round internship opportunities for 1,000 students in grade 9-12. Students work at nonprofits, schools, government agencies, and private businesses up to 6 hours a week for 6-9 months, and are paid \$10/hour.