

HISTORY OF YOUTH CITY COUNCILS

The first Youth Council was established as a cooperative project between locally elected officials in Hyrum, Utah and Utah State University in the early 1970's. Youth Councils are locally sponsored youth education and development programs that use community volunteers who become mentors to teach adolescents how to work within their local political system. The "Youth Council Program" focuses on the four areas of

1. Leadership education & development
2. Providing practical local government knowledge and experience
3. Increasing communication between youth and adults
4. Providing service opportunities for young people to contribute to and benefit from their communities.

The "Youth Council" program educates young people to be responsible, contributing citizens when they reach adulthood. The Association of Youth Councils was organized in March of 1992, with the support and encouragement of the Utah State University administration because the success of the program had outgrown the resources of USU.

Over the years, many elected officials and concerned citizens have felt the need to offer a proven community service and leadership training program to their young people. The Youth Council program is meeting this need in communities of all sizes. The program is providing both service and educational opportunities for young people. Participation in a local Youth Council group will teach adolescents the skills they'll need to become a better prepared work force, better educated citizenry and a better trained corps of future business and civic leaders.

For example, the Youth Council of Pleasant Grove, Utah, chose a project designed to close the generation gap between community young people and senior citizens. With the approval, support and encouragement of the Mayor and City Council, the students organized fund raising projects to provide a senior citizen banquet and entertainment. An essay writing contest, where hundreds of younger students wrote essays about grandparents, was organized at local elementary schools. Several hundred senior citizens personally received handwritten invitations to the banquet. Older Youth Council students and other volunteers provided transportation. On a warm Saturday afternoon, over four hundred senior citizens shared dinner and a program of pre World War II music with the winners of the essay contest. Each winning young author read their essay. The students presented many awards to senior citizens for their long years of community service. Tears were shed, memories were revisited, friendships were established and a mutual respect was kindled between elementary school students the Youth Council and their 400 newly adopted grandparents. After the banquet, the students found that they had a substantial amount of food left over. Instead of dividing it among themselves, they agreed to drive to Salt Lake City on the following day and join with other volunteer groups. On a cold, rainy Sunday morning, they helped feed breakfast to over 500 homeless men, women and children under a freeway overpass.

In Delta, Utah, an activity that the Youth Council promotes is to have Youth Council members select a student who might be classified as a "Youth at Risk" whom they 'adopt'. The Youth Council student becomes a friend with the "At Risk" student and draws them into a new circle of friends who are doing positive things in their school and

community. The goal is to replace inappropriate behavior with community service and eliminate social barriers while improving the quality of the growing up years with as many students as possible. The following year, the "adopted" student is encouraged to join the Youth Council and adopt another 'At Risk' friend thereby causing the circle of influence to grow larger each year.

These two examples represent only a small portion of the community services and activities that adolescents are doing through Youth Council groups. These students learn leadership and teamwork skills while causing positive change in people's lives and within their communities.

These next two examples show how the Youth Council program educates young people and prepares them to be the future leaders of our communities.

Jennifer Siebach joined the South Salt Lake City Youth Council in 1989. She has always been a good worker and was content to support and help others, but Jennifer would never assert herself nor would she organize or take charge of group projects. After receiving encouragement from her parents and her advisor, Jennifer submitted her name for consideration to become the 1992 Youth Mayor. She was successful in achieving her goal and has since successfully taken responsibility for organizing and carrying out the first South Salt Lake City Easter egg hunt. This project involved organizing and leading 30 Council members to complete the activity that involved over 200 community children and parents. Jennifer also organized and conducted a ninety minute leadership training session at the 1992 Youth Council Leadership Institute at Utah State University that involved over 400 participants. Jennifer would not have gained the courage and self confidence nor learned the leadership and personal skills she has developed without being in the South Salt Lake Youth Council.

In Nibley, Utah, Melissa Dabney had served on the Nibley Youth Council for three years before being elected the 1990-91 Youth Mayor. This was the first organization, school or community that Melissa chose to join. "I wasn't a joiner, she admits. "I didn't want to put forth the effort." Then she saw what people can accomplish when they combine their ideas and efforts. She learned leadership skills by attending the Youth Council Leadership Institute at Utah State University and became a powerful organizer and motivator.

"I found out that I really could handle situations. Now I'm more willing to join, to get involved. It's because I see that I can make a difference," Melissa states. We will work with community leaders and concerned citizens anywhere and provide them with an opportunity to learn that they can make a difference in their communities and how to do it while working within the established political system that governs our communities. We are promoting a tried and proven effective youth education and development program. The Youth Council program has made a positive difference in the lives of thousands of adolescents and their families. The Youth Council program prepares teenagers to be better citizens for a better future.