

LINKAGES TO LEARNING

ADVOCACY CAMP

LOCAL THERAPIST LEADS TRIPS TO SENATE CHAMBER AND STATEHOUSE TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Wednesday, July 11, 2018

Last year, Lindsey Foss, mental health therapist, and many other health care providers, began noticing that the young people she worked with were sharing feelings of anxiety and discouragement due to the political climate. "They felt hopeless and like all political power rested on one person," stated Foss. They did not know about the different branches of government or how to effectively advocate beyond messages they were seeing on social media. So, to empower these young people with knowledge and information about how government works while also having fun, she organized an "Advocacy Camp" spring break. As a part of the YMCA, an organization that promotes social responsibility and youth development, Foss knew that this would be a great way for the Y to encourage teens to take action.

Over the last few months, the news has captured teens speaking out and getting their voices heard through walk-outs, marches and social media! But not all teens feel comfortable participating and many feel like they have no power to change their environment. Through the Y Advocacy Camp, 6 youth from Eastern Middle School, Silver Spring International Middle School and Blair High School engaged in conversations national and state representatives in conversations, gained insight on the democratic principles of our nation, and witnessed some of the behind work that occur in the government buildings of our country. This process helped them find their own voices and discover how they too can affect change.



With a full agenda, the youth met with Senator Ben Cardin's staffer in the senate chambers of the capital, interviewed Basant Sanghera of the National Security Council at the Executive Office Building, toured the Supreme Court, visited the State House and Governor's Mansion in Annapolis, learned about the three branches of government, participated in a mock government exercise, and attended a public speaking workshop. After participating in the mock government exercise one teen commented,

"Being in Congress is hard work. [...] Yes, having to collectively agree and make decisions that will greatly affect a whole nation is a lot of work! But thankfully the work and decisions don't just rest on one person's shoulders, and that's the beauty of democracy."

The Y Advocacy Camp exposed these teens to new professions and possibilities, broadening their horizons with the reality that there are thousands of public servants who use their voices and energy in service to the United States every day. Dreams abound in the minds of these young leaders, leading one middle school camper to conclude that he now wants to pursue a career in Diplomatic Security. With new experiences come new dreams, and with new dreams come new possibilities.

Whether through the Y's Advocacy Camp or Youth & Government program, we continue to educate and open doors for the youth.

Do you have an idea to bring new opportunities to the youth of Montgomery County? Do you have the time and interest to get involved in our work? We need people like you! If you are interested in getting involved in the Y Movement, please contact Meredith Smith, Director of Youth Development, at Meredith.smith@ymcadc.org.