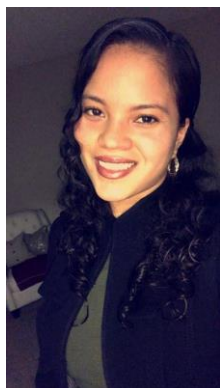


WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROJECT YOUTH IN THEIR OWN WORDS



Coming into Consciousness From *The Feminist Wire*

By Miani Giron (2012)

In the three years that I've been involved in the Women's Leadership Project (WLP) my awareness and outlook on social issues have been positively impacted. Before I joined I was unaware of issues like HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and de facto segregation and how they directly affect my community. I'm not embarrassed to admit that I was ignorant of the issues that have the potential to destroy my community, because it's not my fault that no one ever took the time to educate me on these matters. WLP has made me aware of issues that degrade women; as a result, not only am I conscious, but I am outraged and determined to actively do something about it. My participation in WLP increased my interest in talking to young women in my community to raise awareness. I'm encouraged to advocate and be active in my own school-community. While all the social issues we discuss in WLP are of great importance to me, the issue of mainstream media and female representation really concerns me. The media degrades women and decreases a woman's value by displaying them as sex symbols...I feel like I have to rise above the stigma associated with my community. Hopefully, my activism and decisions to pursue a college education will encourage my younger peers to follow the same path.



Coming into Consciousness

By Liz Soria (2012)

From, the Women's Leadership Project blog

I think of the Women's Leadership Project (WLP) as the light in the darkness. As a senior at Gardena, I had no hope or desire to go to college before WLP. I used to think it would be impossible for me to attend college because I'm undocumented. The program was something special for me because WLP mentors helped me understand the pressures and obstacles we face while encouraging us to attend college. I see all the hard work they do by teaching us about equality, the rights of women, and other things they bring for us to learn. Ms. Hutchinson is my role model because she has inspired me to value educating young women.



How Peer to Peer Engagement Addresses Sexual Harassment

By Kennedy Moore

From Ebony Magazine (2016)

While the majority of Black women I know experience sexual harassment, and too many experience sexual assault, we often don't acknowledge sexual harassment and violence for the problems they are. When we don't step back and question these behaviors that diminish our sense of self worth and power, we accept them in our daily lives. Even though we understand that such behavior is unacceptable, we often face numerous obstacles in speaking out about the harassment we face. Learning how to step forward and speak up requires asking questions. That's where peer-to-peer education — lessons led by students for other students — becomes important. No one can empathize with the problems Black girls face more than Black girls, so naturally we are the ones best positioned to find solutions for our own problems.



Clay Wesley: From Foster Care to College

Women's Leadership Project blog, 2015

"Many of us have no one in our lives discussing sexism, domestic abuse or going to college."

Anyone who meets Clay Wesley can't help but be impressed by her intellectual fierceness, wry wit and deep sense of compassion. I first met Clay when I was teaching a Life Skills workshop on racism and identity at Gardena High School in 2007. She was outspoken about social justice issues and shone as an inquisitive mind and forceful debater. When she began participating in the Women's Leadership Project she dove right into our school-community outreach on sexual assault and sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS prevention, intimate partner violence and college preparation. During the 2008 election cycle she was a strong voice at our student debates on Proposition 4 (which would have required parental notification for abortion) and Proposition 8. Clay's support of choice and reproductive rights was inspirational to other young African American women who have been bombarded with shaming religious messages that abortion is sinful and immoral. Responding to the loss of friends and family as a result of gang, drug, intimate partner and anti-LGBT-related violence in their communities, Clay also helped organize a Day of Remembrance with her peers. For Clay, WLP was formative because, "many of us have no one in our lives discussing sexism, domestic abuse or going to college."



Who Defines Black Hair and Blackness?

By Marena Kyle

Women's Leadership Project blog

As a little girl my mother braided my hair as way to stay in touch with my African-American roots. As someone who continued to wear and became fond of braid culture, seeing my peers bleaching and straightening their hair made me feel like an outcast. In the January 2014 *Big Holiday and Glamour Issue of Sophisticate's Black Hair Styles & Care Guide*, I was relieved to see the advertisement of a *Braids and Natural Hair* mini-magazine. However the Black Hair magazine's definition of "black hair" was light and straight hair opposed to what real black hair is, which is braids and natural hair in the mini-magazine. Who defines black hair and Blackness? As I looked through the magazine I realized that most of the Black models and actresses were light-skinned with light hair. Most of the pages promoted weaves and chemicals to lighten and straighten hair. By these examples, the magazine is conveying the message that is what black hair is supposed to look like. As a proud wearer of braids I encourage people to stick with what they have. To quote India Arie, "I am not my hair."



Cheyenne McLaren, 10th grade, King-Drew

Sexual violence is an important issue for communities of color because women of color are seen as lesser in value than white women and women of color aren't getting the justice they deserve.