



Engagement. Voice. Success.

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The Five Promises

- Caring Adults
- Safe Places
- Healthy Start
- Effective Education
- Opportunities to Help Others

THE ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS WELCOMES NEW YOUTH CO-CHAIR

Esther Lee, a junior at Chaska High School is on the road to big things. She is involved in organizations both in and outside of school, including Student Council, Speech, Chaska's Community Education Advisory Council and the Minnesota Youth Council. "I am involved in these things because I want to become a teacher" says Esther. "I realize education isn't just a classroom in a school, but encompasses culture and community as well. Through my involvement in these activities, I learn more about myself, the power in each organization, and its impact on the community."

A vision to help others is what drives Esther in school and life. "I am blessed to realize that my purpose in life is to become someone who can be a voice for those who don't feel they have a voice, and through education and the activities I am doing, I developed a strong voice." She thanks her parents, teachers and mentors for supporting her quest to be a catalyst of change in others lives.

In Esther's free time, she enjoys reading, running and traveling. In fact, Esther hopes to run a marathon and is

planning a trip to the Middle East. In all aspects of her life, she is motivated by her favorite quote from Harriet Tubman: "Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

Esther is excited about her new position on the Alliance Board of Directors as Youth Co-Chair. "I'm honored to be the new Co-Chair! My position entails helping guide the work of the Alliance and representing the voice of the Minnesota Youth Council on the Board. I'm looking forward to a great year in which I can grow personally as a leader and as an individual by working with the other board members and serving the Alliance."

Welcome to the Board, Esther!



Esther Lee

The Minnesota Alliance With Youth works to ignite the spark in all young people in Minnesota to become actively engaged, develop strong voices and acquire skills needed for success in school, work and life.

"Each time AmeriCorps Promise Fellows gather for a retreat or event, the sense of community we've built is so apparent. We have formed a network that will positively impact our community for years to come. It's incredible to be a part of something so powerful."

-Rachel Ayoub

Promise Fellows Attend Mid-Year Retreat

-Spencer Neitzel, Promise Fellow, MN Alliance With Youth

Promise Fellows gathered for a two day retreat of learning, fun and reconnecting. The All Corps retreat focused on reflecting upon the first half of the Promise Fellows' year of service as well as preparing and gearing up for their second.

A recurring theme of the retreat was service. With MLK Day just around the corner, the Fellows discussed MLK Day plans for their communities. A presentation from Second Harvest Heartland, which sparked ideas for service learning projects, a grant-writing workshop focusing on the Delta Dental Serve a Smile Grant, a presentation from the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center about bullying and internet safety, and a self-reflection workshop that focused on making the most out of a year of service as an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow were offered.

Fellows were treated to an interactive slideshow presented by a group of middle-school students from Southside Family Charter School, South Minneapolis. They presented on their civil rights themed service learning trip through the southern United States. After the slideshow, the youth and Fellows engaged in a conversation about issues they are passionate about.

John Hamerlinck and Promise Fellow Lucy Marincel, of MN Campus Compact, led an activity on asset mapping which allowed Fellows to explore their strengths and learn how to use them as resources.

The Fellows left the retreat with this quote from Dr. King, "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." Fellows were charged with incorporating what they learned at the retreat into the rest of their year of service.



Promise Fellows participate in the Asset Mapping Activity



Minnesota Youth Council Update

The Minnesota Youth Council has some exciting opportunities coming up in February:

- A youth voice listening session on February 8th with Dr. Brenda Cassellius, the newly appointed Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Education
- One day retreat, February 13th to prepare for meeting with MN Legislators on Rally for Youth

In other news, MYC members Lauren Hynnek (Hastings), Esther Lee (Chaska) and Mackenzie Lucas (Hastings) presented to the MN Alliance With Youth Board of Directors at their meeting on January 20th. They spoke about the mission and goals of the MYC and how the Council, Board and other Partners will connect in the future.

MYC engages with communities and serves as a statewide resource to promote youth voice and provide insight on youth and adult issues.

For more information about the MYC and their resources please visit: mnyouth.net/council or email: promisefellow@mnyouth.net



Youth Council Members Mackenzie Lucas and Lauren Hynnek presented to the Board with Esther Lee (Pictured on page 1)

Alliance Steps-Up to Address Dropout Crisis in MN

Each day, 27 youth dropout of Minnesota schools or on average 10,000 youth each year. For most, dropping out of school is a process, not a one-day event. At the same time, students who drop out represent the changing face of Minnesota. The graduation rate for White students is 82%, but is much lower for students of color and lower-income students: Asian: 68%; Hispanic: 45%; Black: 44%; American Indian: 41%; free/reduced-price lunch: 54%. As a state, we know how each class of dropouts impacts Minnesota's wellbeing across communities:

- Lost lifetime earnings totaled more than \$3.6 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education).
- Reducing the number of dropouts by just 50% for a single high school class in the Minneapolis metro area, would result in tremendous economic benefits for the region.
- By earning their diplomas and in many cases continuing their education these new graduates would earn an average of over \$81 million per year in additional wages compared to their likely earnings had they dropped out.

In 2008, Growth and Justice reported, "Prioritizing new investment in our human capital – based on

evidence, directed where improvement is most needed, and focused on interventions that achieve results cost effectively – is the smartest investment Minnesota can make." The Minnesota Alliance With Youth is answering this call to action by significantly increasing its number of Promise Fellows serving throughout Minnesota! The Alliance multi-faceted approach utilizes the power of AmeriCorps to apply various evidence-based strategies to engage youth and keep them on-track to graduate.

Students leaving high school often cite lack of motivation, boredom, or an overall lack of engagement in school as reasons they dropped out. Historically, extra supports have not been available to students until their trajectory of failure is almost impossible to reverse. AmeriCorps Promise Fellows, and the community volunteers they mobilize, create new after-school programs, build mentoring and tutoring initiatives, engage youth in service-learning, and implement other effective yet labor-intensive strategies. Our commitment to provide "the right support to the right youth at the right time," is an innovative and cost effective solution to address the dropout crisis in Minnesota. **For complete details, visit our website at www.mnyouth.net.**

Promise Fellow Spotlight: Charles Newell, Wilder Foundation

Why did you become a Promise Fellow?

I became a Promise Fellow because my life's passion is to enhance the lives of youth and I am getting that opportunity through my AmeriCorps experience. As a young person, I know that we grow from experiences like participating in sports or being a member of in and out of school time programs or community groups. I had several of these experiences growing up and I believe they are what have made me who I am today.

Your Promise Fellow Experience:

I serve at the Wilder Foundation where I work with youth from transitional housing. I focus on connecting youth to the community through service learning and civic engagement. My best experience so far was at the Wilder Foundation Holiday party for youth and their families. Everyone was having a great time, which was rewarding for me because I know the



Charles Newell

challenges these youth and their families face. In spite of this, not a single family was kept from having a good time. To me, that speaks to their strength of character and this strength gives my work hope.

A little bit about Charles:

I grew up in Oakdale, MN and graduated from Tartan High School in 2005. I have already learned so much and I will continue to use what I've learned as an AmeriCorps Promise

Fellow as I plan to become a teacher and one day start a young men's program. I am a husband, father, part time student and the Children's Minister at New Vision Faith Center. When I have free time I like to relax, watch movies, and love to socialize. Put me in a room with my friends and within minutes I'm having fun!

Favorite Quote:

"Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right!" - Henry Ford

Community Spotlight: Fergus Falls Community Education

-Mike Walls, Promise Fellow, Fergus Falls

A mosaic of streets, cozy downtown shops, and common acquaintances at the local grocery store, paint a friendly picture of that oh, so nice, “rural Minnesotan” town. But, on second glance you will see a gaggle of students eager to attend their new Kennedy Secondary School. Claire and I, both Fergus Falls High School graduates, returned home to serve our community through youth engagement, after completing Bachelor’s degrees. We’ve eagerly connected with students and our community in a number of ways. The days are filled coordinating civic engagement programs, tutoring, and meeting with students to promote academic success. Claire is taking the helm of the “Senior Mentorship” program, an upperclassman favorite. This program connects 25 high school seniors, with elementary classrooms to mentor youth for in-class help. I have taken on the role as Adopt-a-Class coordinator, where I have paired 46 local businesses with K-6 classrooms. The partnership begins with a \$100 contribution to the class and meeting at various times to interact throughout the year. Afternoons, Claire is involved with tutoring 6th-9th grade students in an elective course, and I independently tutor several High School students.

Our youth engagement program, “Make-A-Difference”, has proven to be a favorite among Middle School students this year, with over 85



AmeriCorps Promise Fellows
Mike Walls and Claire Stich

students participating. This cohort of 6th-8th grade students meets every Tuesday during lunch to discuss topics around social inequality and ways to engage their community through service learning projects. This fall has already brought loads of excitement. “Make-A-Difference” students have enjoyed sitting in their own Otter Varsity Football cheering section, riding on a Homecoming Parade float, and participating in a Halloween carnival. Many “Make-A-Difference” students are excited for the upcoming Students Today, Leaders Forever – Pay it Forward Tour which includes a trip to Hutchinson and Minneapolis where we will volunteer at various sites and learn about poverty issues.

We’ve had incredible support from our School -Community Partnership members on all our endeavors, which include the YMCA, Public Library, and A Center for the Arts. We also received an ISD 544 Foundation grant, which provides staff to support tutoring at our largest elementary school. Collaboration among students, staff, community, and businesses has made this year remarkable. So next time you’re musing about Fergus Falls, don’t just think about how we’ve been “Tree City USA” for 31 years or our Guinness Book record for most churches per square mile, but think about this community’s enduring commitment to serve its youth.



A few members of “Make-A-Difference”

Introducing the Alumni Association

-Carolyn Westra, Promise Fellow Alum '05-'06

Although it's been five years since I finished serving as an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow, I remember my year of service very fondly and am still in touch with a few of the people I served with. There's no doubt that my year with AmeriCorps had a huge influence on me and my career path which is why I was so excited to learn that the Alliance is creating an Alumni Association!

On MLK Day, we celebrated the launch of the Alumni Association with a reception at the Burnsville Performing Arts Center. The event was a great opportunity to reconnect with old friends and make new ones! There was a great group of attendees including members of the first Promise Fellow corps (1999-2000) and two-week old daughter of 2006-2007 alum Kim Sabers. Perhaps she'll be in the Promise Fellow class of 2033?

Great discussions were had by all. We talked about education-related topics, like the challenges faced by new teachers and funding priorities. We also chatted as a large group, introducing ourselves and brainstorming ideas for the Alumni Association. Plans for the Alumni Association include: mentoring current Promise Fellows, continuing to serve our schools and communities through volunteer events, serving as ambassadors to carry out the mission of the Alliance and staying connected to other alumni through the Alumni Association.

We encourage you to be a part of the network of Promise Fellow Alumni and continue a life of service. The next planning meeting will be held Tuesday, February 8th at 6pm in the Alliance Offices. We invite you to help shape the Alumni Association! **To get involved, please email: info@mnyouth.net**



MLK Day 2011 Observed by Promise Fellows

On January 17th, our nation observed the 25th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day. To honor Dr. King, Promise Fellows engaged their students in service projects within their communities. Below are examples of what Promise Fellows did to make it a "day on, not a day off."

Clearwater Middle School

Waconia

Fifth graders spent the afternoon of MLK Day at nursing homes in the area singing to residents and playing Bingo. Sixth graders went to package meals at Kids Against Hunger, where they were able to package 23,000 meals and helped prepare for an event this summer by creating luminary bags. The seventh graders made sandwiches for Project 363; they were able to make 1,500 sandwiches to be given to homeless shelters in the metro area. Eighth graders hosted a lunch for the community to raise money to purchase school supplies for a school in Bukoba, Tanzania. They served 275 meals for donations to support the school. Overall, a very busy, but very rewarding day for the students at Clearwater!

-Promise Fellow Nicole Klaustermeier



Prairie Seeds Academy

Brooklyn Park

Students at Prairie Seeds Academy spent MLK Day gathering, weighing, and sorting food donations in the culmination of their food drive. With the help of adult volunteers, they put an end to their month-long project with huge success. They asked for donations from their community and got a great response. The awareness that food collected would be helping people in our immediate community (via the emergency Food Network) was something that excited the students and made them feel like what they were doing was valuable. Though we do not have an exact weight of food donated yet, the extent to which these students engaged their community makes it our biggest success yet.

-Promise Fellow Kaylie Burns





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The Minnesota Alliance With Youth is the leading convener, collaborator and capacity-builder for youth development in Minnesota.

The Alliance mission is to ignite the spark in all young people in Minnesota to become actively engaged, develop strong voices and acquire skills needed for success in school, work and life.

In order to ensure all youth achieve success in school, work, and life, we focus on four strategies:

- 1) Strengthening youth success in school and learning.
- 2) Increasing youth contribution through service & leadership opportunities.
- 3) Developing and magnifying youth voice.
- 4) Promoting collaboration and innovation.

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The vision of the Alliance is that all young people are highly connected to their communities, have hope for a brighter future and are able to fulfill their dreams.

UPCOMING EVENTS

February

African American History Month
Find events and resources at
www.asalh.org

Random Acts of Kindness Week
February 14-20
www.actsofkindness.org

**Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs
State Conference**
February 23-25
Duluth, MN
www.maapmn.org

March

Rally for Youth Day
Minnesota State Capitol
March 3, 2011

April

Global Youth Service Day
Mall of America
April 17, 2011