

LEV & CCER's
Youth Advocacy Summit & Fall Fest
Event Recap

A Unique Approach to Empowering Youth Advocacy

The Youth Advocacy Summit & Fall Fest, in its inaugural year, brought together a partnership of three distinct organizations that all aimed to celebrate and honor the vibrancy of youth advocacy, lay the foundation for meaningful change, and set a new standard for future work.

[League of Education Voters \(LEV\)](#) and [Community Center for Education Results \(CCER\)](#) both care deeply about making room for youth leadership in the education space. LEV, a statewide advocacy organization, dedicates its efforts to the legislative sessions in Washington, while also working on other statewide community initiatives in the Seattle, Tri-Cities, and Spokane regions. CCER, a community-based organization, is focused on South King County's Road Map Region and is deeply rooted in and connected to the pervasive influence of race on the experiences and outcomes of children of color in these communities. What made this event truly unique was not just the collaboration between LEV and CCER, but also the involvement of a diverse team of youth partners. These young advocates hailed from different regions and organizations across the state - two students from the [Legislative Youth Advisory Council \(LYAC\)](#), two students from the [Choose 180 Youth & Young Adult Advocacy program](#), and one student from the [King County Play Equity Coalition Youth Action Team](#). They brought a myriad of interests and experiences

doing advocacy work, and our task with them was to shape the event according to their vision.

A team of staff from both LEV and CCER worked to put on three planning sessions with youth partners and prioritized building an environment of authenticity, vulnerability, and creative exploration. They focused on building trust, collectively defining what “advocacy” meant to them, identifying issues that mattered to them, and letting ideas flow freely. The topics that emerged from these co-design sessions were as diverse as the group itself. They ranged from addressing sexual and domestic violence, gun violence, racism, homelessness, the foster system, mental health, to the intricacies of special education. The co-design team wanted the event to feel informal, to allow attendees to choose their own adventure. And ultimately, they wanted to honor and uplift student voices in a meaningful way while encouraging students’ independence as much as possible. Importantly, LEV and CCER compensated the youth co-designers for their

MEET THE CO-DESIGN TEAM!

Au'Juleigh (Leigh) Howard (she/her) is the young business owner of Reborn Majesty, a clothing line that represents the rebirth of sexual abuse victims in all their majesty. She has been advocating to raise awareness on youth issues like gun violence, sexual abuse, crime, and the school to prison pipeline since the age of 12. One of Leigh's proudest achievements was graduating from high school while going through a dark time and still getting the resources to launch her business. In the coming years, Leigh would like to expand her brand - her aspirations are to complete an esthetician, cosmetology, and barbering program and operate her own beauty shop.

Stacy Osoria (she/her) is a student at Shorewood High School and a member of the Washington state Legislative Youth Advisory Council (LYAC). She is an accomplished advocate for the importance of mental health & wellness at school, diverse representation in curricula, and more.

Micah Fitzgerald (she/her) is a senior at Richland High School and involved in the Running Start program in Tri-Cities, Washington. She is a member of the Washington State Legislative Youth Advisory Council, a member of the Adolescent Health Youth Advisory Council for the Department of Health, and a representative for the superintendent council at her high school. Micah also volunteers at Farm2Fresh food drives and at her church. In 2022, she was named Miss Juneteenth Scholarship Pageant's first princess. Micah loves cruises, traveling, shopping, and getting involved in any way possible to benefit her community.

Sophia Sekits (she/her) is currently a junior at Newport High School in Bellevue. She has a passion for sports and leadership. Sophia plays and coaches soccer, coaches debate, and is starting lacrosse this school year. She is a member of the King County Play Equity Coalition's Youth Action Team. Sophia believes that the youth are our future and fights for our community to invest in them and raise up their voices.

Victoria D. is a Washington high school student and part of the Choose 180 Youth & Young Adult Advocacy Program, which helps young people learn about methods of advocacy for and with their communities.

LEAGUE OF EDUCATION VOTERS FOUNDATION

CCER
Community Center for Education Results

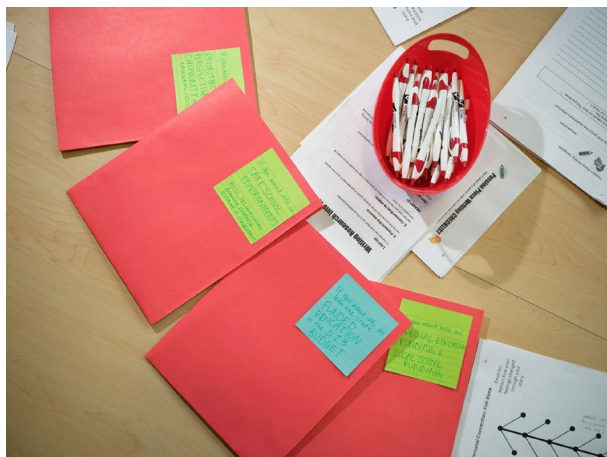
time and hard work consulting for this event. At the event, the team aired a [video about the co-design team and process](#).

Connecting and Learning through Workshops

The event began with a series of workshops designed to connect, empower, and educate. Half of the workshops were to be led by students and the other half by skill experts on topics the youth partners identified. These different workshops allowed attendees to tailor their experience, explore what mattered most to them, and “choose their own adventure.”



Leigh Howard, one of the youth co-design partners, led a workshop on a critical and personal topic - awareness and advocacy around sexual assault - and demonstrated powerful advocacy and leadership in a supportive community. Another youth partner, Stacy Osoria, had planned a workshop on "Persistence & Dealing with Rejection in Advocacy Work." While a last-minute health emergency prevented Stacy from conducting her workshop, the remaining workshops offered valuable learning opportunities for youth and adults alike. Jennifer Putman, the School Transformation Partner at [South Shore PK-8 School](#) and League of Education Voters, facilitated an interactive discussion about the process of getting Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Social-Emotional Learning resources at your school, much like what they have at South Shore. Staff from [Speak With Purpose](#) led a 90-minute session about “writing and delivering a passion piece,” one of their popular, in-school programs, and both youth and adults orated on topics from mental health supports at school, eliminating the wealth gap, addressing climate change, and the importance of exploring identity.



These workshops opened doors to valuable connections and meaningful experience. Organizations like Speak With Purpose found immense value in making new connections with passionate individuals and organizations involved in youth advocacy. Such events become critical avenues for these organizations to network and find partners that share their mission and values. It also allowed young people like Leigh to practice bravery

and leadership in the context of community advocates, an experience she found powerful and that motivated the people around her.



Advocacy through Performance and Self-Expression



Youth partners also expressed a desire for a performance space during the event, where both young and older voices could express themselves, address the group, and enrich the agenda with different ways of engaging with advocacy. For example, Rahma Mohammed, a graduate of South Shore, current college student, and Educator Innovator at Speak With Purpose, performed her passion piece, "[Bang Bang](#)" at the start of the performance block. The piece provided a raw and emotional

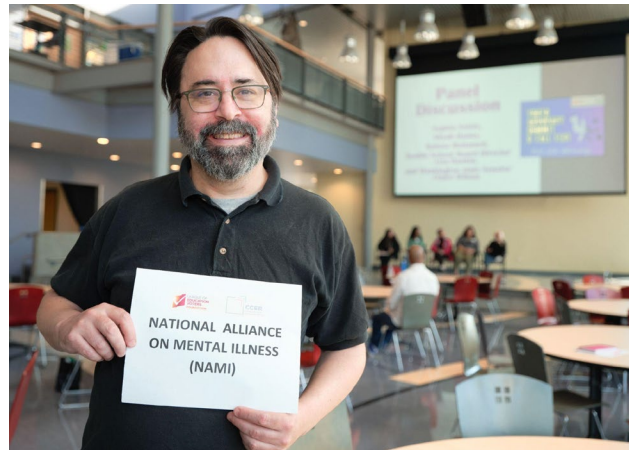
perspective on gun violence and the struggles of being an American school student in the current political climate. Her performance ignited a deeper understanding of the horror and challenges that students daily face at school.

[We also heard from Blaire Penry](#), an inspirational figure in the education field and recently named 2024 Washington state Teacher of the Year. She used her platform to stress the significance of youth voice and leadership in advocacy: "As a teacher, my goal is to embolden my students' voices to help



them see how strong and how powerful their voices are. It's thrilling to be in a space where I can see so many who embody that spirit." This was her first public event in her new role, a testimony to her own dedication to youth advocacy and the value of convening emerging leaders in spaces like these.

Alongside these performances, the organizations tabling at the event seized the opportunity to share their projects and engage with the attendees. The [King County Library System](#) invited participants to join their "For Freedoms" project, where young people were invited to create posters on the theme of freedom. Meanwhile, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) in Seattle](#) shared mental health resources and encouraged participation in their storybanking initiative, focusing on wellness, self-care, and overall well-being. Finally, the group watched a [video highlighting the incredible work of even more youth advocates](#) over the past few years who have participated in advocacy opportunities provided by LEV and CCER.



Youth-Led Panel Conversation with Elected Officials

One of the highlights of the event was the [panel discussion](#) that brought together youth advocates and elected officials. This panel served as a model for authentic collaboration between youth and adult system leaders in advocacy. Sophia, one of the youth partners, skillfully facilitated the discussion. Having a young person lead the panel was important to the

co-design team, as was making sure we centered the voices and experiences of young advocates before turning to the adult panelists.

The panelists included three students, ranging from high school to college - Sophia Sekits, Aliyah Banks, and Rahma Mohammed - alongside Washington state Senator Claire Wilson and Seattle School Board Vice President Liza Rankin. For the students, the questions touched upon their



initial inspiration for advocacy, the most rewarding and challenging moments in their advocacy work, and how advocacy had shaped their personal growth and aspirations. Afterwards, Sophia asked the elected officials what were their key takeaways from listening to the youth advocates and about how we can create truly safe and inclusive spaces for youth to

participate more meaningfully in local and statewide work. Both spoke to the important ideas that youth voices have historically brought to their tables. "Just so you know," said Senator Claire Wilson, "...things like student voting rights at the State Board of Education, child care subsidies for teen parents, comprehensive sex ed that included affirmative consent - those all came from young people... Inclusive curricula, the sex trafficking and awareness bill we just passed, redacting personal information relating to student records so young people are not outed when they don't want to be... all of those things were things that came to me through the voice of young people. That's how laws change."

At the end of the panel, an audience member asked the youth panelists, "If you could make one school board policy or one law, what would it be?" Sophia, Aliyah, and Rahma mentioned a number of topics, including ending the practice of elected officials accepting corporate funding for their campaigns, making conversations around current events and social justice issues a regular part of school, reducing gas prices, encouraging public speaking skills at school, and ensuring accurate and representative history curriculum.

This panel provided a unique and new opportunity for some of the youth panelists to speak publicly in a setting like this, especially alongside system leaders. For others, it was a familiar stage, but no less significant. The panel was also a valuable experience for the elected officials, providing a platform for them to truly listen to the concerns and ideas of youth. Such



opportunities for leaders to listen to student voices in a manner that holds them accountable are rare but essential.

A Valuable Experience and Blueprint for the Future

The Youth Advocacy Summit was a powerful event that many want to see happen again. The journey of building out this event was deeply valuable to those involved. It was a catalyst for

urgent and active collaboration among passionate organizations and individuals, and it fostered stronger connections than other forms of work. The relationships forged during the planning process, the involvement of additional organizations, and the networking among leaders, youth, and community members have set the stage for deeper and more impactful partnerships going forward.



In addition, the willingness of elected officials and other powerful figures - like Senator Wilson, Director Rankin,

and 2024 State Teacher of the Year Blaire Penry - to take the time to join this event on a weekend demonstrated to LEV, CCER, and students how many system leaders are genuinely committed to youth and youth advocacy work. It's proof to many that youth-led, youth-centered

events are not only valued but also trusted as a viable pathway for advocacy that makes an impact on leaders. Relatedly, the importance of coming together in person cannot be overstated. The sense of togetherness, shared goals, and common aspirations are tangible when you are in the same space, and it is especially important when working with students and young people.

Finally, the connections individuals made during the event will carry themselves far beyond the day itself. This event helped establish a network of passionate individuals, organizations, and students that share common goals and values around youth advocacy. For example, the King County Library System and NAMI, who found immense value in their resource tables, were present throughout the entire day, engaging with attendees, learning from youth leaders at the event, and seeking deeper connections with the education and advocacy space. Other organizations like [Open Doors for Multicultural Families](#), [Building Changes](#), and the [United Way of King County](#) attended, along with new groups of students and families who came to listen, learn, and offer new ideas.



Youth advocacy is a topic that many express interest in but often lack the means to effectively build it into something truly inclusive and impactful. The Youth Advocacy Summit & Fall Fest offered a blueprint for empowering youth advocacy and building it into a larger, more connected movement. It demonstrated that with the right partnerships, a co-design approach, and a commitment to centering youth voices, we can create a platform that actually moves us all closer to empowering young people to become our state's key thinkers, advocates, and leaders, especially in the education space.

As we look back on the first Youth Advocacy Summit & Fall Fest, we are excited about the possibilities it represents. We've learned, we've connected, and we've seen the potential for youth advocacy to shape policies and create meaningful change. We are committed to carrying this momentum forward, and we look forward to future work and future support around this movement.

