

# YELL: Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning

at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

*Many of our best young people today wonder whether they have any place in this vast and complicated society of ours...In my judgment, there isn't any quicker cure for that ailment than evidence that their society needs them.*

*- John W. Gardner*



## What is YELL?

YELL promotes youth as partners, resources, and leaders in their communities – in neighborhoods, in schools, and in youth organizations and programs - and explores the conditions necessary to create and sustain positive outcomes for youth. The JGC initiated YELL in 2000 as a nine month after school program that trained 15 eighth grade students as community researchers, advisors, and socially conscious leaders. With JGC program staff, embedded researchers, school and community partners, and youth themselves contributing to program development, YELL expanded to include 350 middle school and high school youth in two Bay Area communities over the next six years. In 2006, JGC transitioned YELL program leadership to schools and community based organizations in Redwood City and West Oakland, and now offers support and assistance to these organizations. YELL experienced many successes during its first six years, including:

- Use of youth driven research based recommendations informing presentations to, dialogues with, and decisions of school leaders, city leaders, councils, and commissions;
- Placement of youth in leadership positions, including as mentors, grant-makers, and evaluators within youth-serving organizations as well as on school leadership teams and advisory boards;
- Initiation of youth and adult volunteer initiatives, public art projects, community forums, and intergenerational events.

## Positive Outcomes for Youth, Adults, and Communities

JGC research highlights three important ways that the YELL program has promoted youth leadership skills: (1) fostering strong communication skills by valuing young people's ideas and opinions; (2) encouraging analytic thinking through a research-based approach to social change; and (3) creating multiple opportunities for positive community involvement. The combination of these three leadership skills is essential for YELL's success with young people. Adults and communities also directly benefit from the program. Adults develop relationships and partnerships with young people, knowledge of youth strengths, and skills to support youth as contributors to community solutions. Communities benefit from youth driven data and recommendations for decision making, engaged and competent youth, and youth and adults who can work together for mutual benefit.

## YELL Today

Today, YELL is more than a program; it includes:

- Tested curriculum to develop communication, leadership and community based research skills;
- Live program models for middle school and high school settings;
- Coaching in youth development and YELL implementation;
- Trained youth mentors, advisors and facilitators;
- Published academic articles and issue briefs on youth leadership and civic engagement.

These resources can be used by anyone who wants to engage with young people in making community places, programs, and policies better for everyone.

JGC has layered strategies for advancing YELL in the 2007-2008 school year. Staff will continue to promote high quality youth development practices through YELL curriculum, as well as support and research existing YELL programs, focused specifically on sustainability. A new research project will concentrate on the long-term outcomes of original YELL participants. Expansion of YELL programs and practices in San Mateo County will lead to new organizational alliances as well as research projects to support high quality youth development environments. Importantly, JGC will continue to apply YELL research and practice to Center structures and strategic direction.

