

Civic engagement among youth is crucial for not only the individuals involved but also for society. When the youth are actively involved in community service, politics, and activism, they are contributing to the growth of an energetic and welcoming democracy that ensures the voices of the future generations are heard. Civic engagement at an early age can have a lasting impact on a youth's sense of leadership, responsibility, and awareness of the issues affecting their communities and the world. Civic engagement could spark changes that need to be addressed socially, politically, and economically.

One way that youth can make a difference is through participation in local and state politics. As a member of the City of West Park Youth Council for over two years, I've had the privilege of seeing how youth engagement in politics can drive purposeful change. One of the highlights of my experience was visiting the state capital, where I was able to meet various state representatives to discuss the issues affecting young people and my local community. This experience has not only allowed me to advocate for the issues affecting my community and the needs of my peers, but it also taught me how policies are shaped and the importance of building relationships with lawmakers to make a change in the world. My role in the council has allowed me to learn that even with the smallest of voices, if we're all united, we can have a significant impact on policies that affect our communities and demand a social change.

Youth engagement in community service plays an important role in addressing pressing needs and promoting long-term societal change. Community service allows for the youth to be aware of the issues that their community faces and allows them to directly contribute to solutions that can help their communities. Volunteering with local organizations by helping organize food drives, toy drives, participating in environmental clean-ups or assisting in programs that support at-risk youth, fosters a sense of community and responsibility. All these different community services help address the needs of the community such as homelessness, hunger, poverty, climate change, and beautifying our communities. Through these actions, youth not only help those around them but also learn vital leadership and organizational skills. Moreover, the act of giving back builds empathy, which helps the youth to understand and address social issues in their communities.

Activism has also become an important avenue for young people to express their concerns on societal issues. From advocating climate change to gun control, youth-led movements have been the forefront of pushing for societal change. The impact of youth activism can be seen in the success of campaigns such as the March for Our Lives movement or the global Fridays for Future climate change strikes. These movements not only show the passion of today's youth but also the capableness of influencing policies that affect not only their community but the world.

Despite the numerous benefits of civic engagement, the youth face several barriers to civic engagement. One of the barriers is the lack of access to resources that would allow them to actively engage in political or community service. Furthermore, there's often been the stigma that a young person's opinions don't carry as much power compared to an adult's opinions. Additionally, the growing pressures of school, social media, and work can make it difficult for young people to have the energy to devote to civic engagement. However, educational institutions can help break down these barriers by providing resources for students to engage in civic education and leadership development. By adding lessons on government and community service into the school's curriculum, students to be better

prepared to participate in civic life. Also, youth councils also play a vital role in creating platforms for young people to grow as leaders.

In conclusion, the importance of Civic Engagement for youth cannot be ignored. Through the participation of local and state politics, community service, and activism, youth not only help improve their communities but also help shape their futures. My own experiences with the youth council have allowed me to grow and learn as a leader, shape my community for the better, and taught me how impactful youth involvement can be. Despite the challenges that we, the youth face, increased engagement has long-lasting benefits for us and the future. With the right support and opportunities, the world can be changed for the better.