



Sustaining a Movement: The Status of Feminist Youth-led Leadership Organizations

Young feminist groups are using innovative strategies to create social change in their communities and across the nation. In our first national survey of feminist, youth-focused organizations, Third Wave captured these groups' impact on institutions – from school boards to the media to all levels of government. This impact is possible because young feminist groups have a strong volunteer and membership base of almost 70,000 and are truly representative of their communities. The organizations surveyed here are primarily led by and serve young people, low-income individuals, and people of color.

Nevertheless, the reach and successes of young feminist groups is only half – the sunnier half – of the story. These groups are operating under incredible resource strain and are at risk for burn out. While this presents a challenge to organizations constantly strapped for cash, it is also an opportunity for funders. A relatively small amount of dollars to any of these organizations could have a large impact on these individual groups, as well as the field.

Recognizing a comprehensive analysis of the impact of feminist youth-based strategies for change did not currently exist, Third Wave Foundation believed it vital to document the current impact and the potential for greater impact in the future of feminist youth-led organizations. In 2007, Third Wave worked with the DataCenter to develop a national survey exploring an organization's current work, including program strategies, outcomes, budget and program change in 2007 versus 2003. From November 2007 – February 2008, 65 self-identified feminist youth organizations participated in the 45-minute survey. Third Wave and the DataCenter analyzed the data in aggregate, with the anonymity of respondents respected. The findings have allowed Third Wave to effectively assess the impact of youth-led organizations and the resources needed to do youth-led feminist work.

We are excited to share that our findings thus far have proven the impact of feminist youth leaders on the social justice movement. We found that by operating through a feminist lens, Third Wave youth leaders are changing the social justice movement in many ways, including:

- ◆ Although 40% of Third Wave youth leaders are developing models of organizing and leadership development that draw heavily from feminist structures and practices as well as from grassroots self-determination movements, youth leaders are developing new innovative strategies as well. 95% of groups who did not base their model on one practiced elsewhere created their own models.

- ◆ Third Wave leaders change how organizations operate. Because they believe it is not enough for an organization to just work towards social change, but rather an organization should actively represent change, feminist youth leaders create or alter organizations with internal policies that reflect sustainability and respect for the employees. Work hours, leaves of absences, and other organizational policies place value in a friendly and healthy work environment. 23% of groups provide some form of childcare or compensation for childcare, through onsite care, reimbursement vehicles, or pre-tax accounts.
- ◆ The impact of Third Wave youth leaders can be felt across a broad range of communities and movements. Organizations' top three constituencies were low-income individuals, persons of color, and youth aged 30 and younger. Besides their constituents, organizations also worked with secondary constituencies that are part of their mission, including: disabled individuals; the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning community; formerly incarcerated; survivors of sexual abuse; survivors of domestic violence; sex workers; and incarcerated.
- ◆ While average membership sizes of organizations surveyed was 436, the reach of these organizations extends far beyond their members. In 2007 alone, groups trained between 6,700 and 9,700 individuals and attracted 8,600 to 11,500 people to their speaking engagements.
- ◆ From economic justice, reproductive justice, police brutality, welfare rights, violence and criminal justice, Third Wave youth leaders have already played an important role in changing local and state policies on social justice issues. More than half of the groups surveyed sought to impact legislation, with 57% of these groups being successful in proposing, passing, halting or repealing legislation.

These findings will be included in our upcoming report which examines feminist youth leadership. The two major components of the report are: 1) impact assessment, which takes a historical and progressive look at the impact of youth-based feminist organizing within social justice; and 2) funding, which explores the realities of funding for youth-led feminist change, including locating Third Wave within the spectrum of issue- and movement-specific funding trends. Our findings are intended to motivate new thinking and action in the field of philanthropy. The report will be available in late Fall 2008.

For more information about the Third Wave Foundation and DataCenter national survey and our upcoming report, please contact Kimberly McKee, Philanthropic Partnerships Officer, at either 212.228.8311 ext. 15 or kim@thirdwavefoundation.org