

Affinity, Advocacy, Activism: Spokane Youth of Color Coalition

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Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/spokaneyouthofcolorcoalition>

Sign-up form: <https://secure.everyaction.com/Lts7iVSHi0yTzzSLwSe1Mw2>

Podcast website: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/2066266>

Summary:

The Spokane Youth of Color Coalition is an organization that is part affinity space, part advocacy group for youth of color in Spokane, Washington. Through twice-a-month virtual affinity spaces/resource workshops and a podcast titled “CPT”, SYCC trains youth of color in dialogue, intercommunity bridge-building, coalition generation, and leadership while simultaneously engaging the broader Spokane community with our work.

Project Description:

A predominantly white and conservative small Eastern Washington city, Spokane has a complicated history of hostility towards its few community members of color, with youth of color being especially vulnerable to racial animus. In the summer of 2020, facing growing frustration at the lack of activism and support for youth of color in their local community, project members Ilina Logani and Aaliyah Bains realized that Spokane lacked a culture of mentorship for youth of color to rely on when facing racism in their communities.

Having mentors that match a student’s race and share similar experiences with them is crucial to BIPOC youth’s academic and developmental success: it raises self-reported “personal effort, happiness in class, and college aspirations” and is a key driver of “intellectual and personal self-confidence” among youth of color (Pitt and Packard, “Activating Diversity”; Egalite and Kisida, “The Effects of Teacher Match”). The lack of access to mentorship and community for youth of color in Spokane continues to actively harm those in crucial academic and social developmental stages.

Our project members are strong advocates for homegrown advocacy: the most effective, tangible, and generative change, we believe, comes from those who are intimately familiar with and have personal stake in the communities they are attempting to make better. As such, the two of them began to plan a new initiative—Spokane Youth of Color Coalition—working with community leaders active in justice circles in Spokane to secure financial support and training to facilitate this advocacy and mentorship group.

One meeting each month creates a virtual affinity space for youth of color to gather, combat racial isolationism, and engage in community joy in an environment centered around the ideals of affirmation

and self-worth. The second monthly meeting is centered around advocacy workshops, oriented around themes of self-advocacy and community engagement. These workshops are hosted by professional community members and rely on resources from the Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane. Finally, we engage with the broader Spokane community through a monthly podcast that engages with the social landscapes of Eastern Washington as told through the perspectives of its youth of color. The podcast has so far discussed the experience of election season in the Inland Northwest as a youth of color as well as an interview with community leaders speaking to Spokane's history of advocacy work, starting in the mid-1900s.

Throughout the implementation of this project, a few aspects of the original plan have changed. Some community leaders have left the project as they moved on to other careers; others have joined. Perhaps most importantly, the resources available through our advocacy space have morphed to match the needs expressed by those who utilize our platform. Upcoming mentorship opportunities center appropriately around financial literacy, college application advice, and how to navigate discussing race with teachers and professors.

Our largest budget expense is related to Staffing Costs due to our organization's commitment to providing financial support for the advocacy work that is often undertaken unpaid and unsupported by youth of color in Spokane. Organizing advocacy meetings and affinity spaces takes time, energy, and resources; ensuring that our facilitators are adequately trained and compensated for this time and skill is paramount to our mission. Ultimately, our organization centers on the resources that facilitators of color can provide to youth of color in the city through their very personhood: mentorship, leadership in facilitating affinity space sessions, communication, and advocating for their constituent attendees throughout the city. Our organization would not be able to harness the people-power necessary to host our affinity and advocacy spaces without the majority of our funds being put towards supporting the people that host our sessions. These funds were wired to the appropriate individuals based on a breakdown of labor costs—e.g. how many weeks worked, how many hours spend facilitating, working communications, etc.

The second largest budgetary expense relates to marketing and event support—this includes payments towards the organizations that professionally trained our youth facilitators to lead advocacy workshops. Finally, the last portion of our budget goes towards equipment and supplies; these directly support our podcast work through the purchase of quality microphones and a subscription to an audio-editing program, Descript.

Reflection:

Within a young community that has experienced extensive racial hostility and violence, we define peace as an inner sense of belonging in one's community: a feeling of safety among those with shared experiences, of support from older mentors, and of trust in the long slow work of change. It is defined by a deeply rooted sense of self-worth in spite of--and, perhaps, because of--one's experiences.

Intercommunity peace, on the other hand, is defined by a balance of resources, power, and respect. It comes when both parties at stake feel they have space at the metaphorical table to advocate for their own needs and the tools necessary to communicate with and fully understand one another.

In the short term, our project has begun to contribute to intra-community peace by ensuring that youth of color in Spokane have access to an affirming group with shared experiences and resources. The mere gathering of stories and dialogue have incited laughter and companionship, beginning the healing and peace-generating process. The youth of color who have begun utilizing our space have expressed keen continued interest in the affinity group we are building and are intent on helping to further build our group to reach more youth.

The educational element of our organization also has the potential to build long-term intercommunity peace. With advocacy workshops continuing to provide long-term training in activism and leadership to interested youth of color, our organization will in the future develop a culture within Spokane of

conscientious skills-based advocacy. Achieving peace is not a spontaneous, arbitrary process: it takes time, careful dialogue, coalition-building skills, and effective leadership. Providing youth of color with the necessary tools and resources over the next few years to engage with activism in this deliberate, step-by-step manner will foster peace between White and non-White populations in Spokane. At the same time, the project's continuing podcast will also help drive long-term intercommunity peace: in calling broader Spokane community members of all races to be interviewed for this podcast, we will be engaging in a dialogue between all impacted members of the community to build shared understanding and respect.

Personal Statement:

Ilina Logani: "Leading the Spokane Youth of Color Coalition (SYCC) has been conscious commitment to combatting racial isolationism and engaging in community joy in Spokane, Washington. Over the past several months, we have learned what it means to build a culture of mentorship from the ground up, helping one another develop skills in dialogue, bridge-building, and advocacy. Within a young community that has experienced extensive racial hostility and violence, we aim instead for peace—an inner sense of belonging in one's community, a feeling of safety among those with shared experiences, a reliance on older mentors, and the ability to trust in the long, slow, and restorative work of change."