

2006 Youth Activist Scholarship -- Hannah Picasso-Hobin (5/5/2006)

Hannah Picasso-Hobin is a senior at the Denver, Colorado School of the Arts. The Colorado affiliate of the ACLU sees her leadership as being one of the primary reasons their Youth Education Program has met with such success. Hannah started a school chapter of the ACLU in her freshman year and has since become a role model for other student leaders statewide.

Following is Hannah's scholarship essay:

From the moment I heard about the American Civil Liberties Union, I wanted to be involved. The need for this organization is profound. It protects the very lifeblood of America. The reaches of the ACLU should extend to youth. We are the leaders of tomorrow and the responsibility for ensuring the future of our democratic society lies with us. Throughout high school, I have worked to increase awareness about civil liberties in my community. I worked with the Colorado chapter of the ACLU and started a chapter at my high school. Working towards increasing my own understanding and awareness as well as that of others has been one of the most important and exciting parts of my education so far. I will continue to work with organizations such as this throughout college and beyond.

Primarily I have worked with the Youth Education Programming Committee of the ACLU of Colorado. Through the past four years I have been involved as this group grew from including three Colorado high schools to its current status of involving many students from schools across the state. I have been part of the development of new and exciting projects to capture the attention of other students. Three years ago, I helped with the planning and promotion of the first annual Colorado Youth for Civil Liberties Expo. This conference brings students to the Denver University Law School for an afternoon of lectures by law professors and other experts followed by discussion on various topics pertaining to current events and civil liberties. I continue to be a part of this effort each year. Events like this are crucial for increasing excitement and awareness about civil liberties among young people. I have been part of discussions for development on many new exciting projects including mentoring programs with college students.

I started a chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union at my high school, extending the reach of this organization so that its message is heard by more students. Through the past three years we have held interesting discussions and taken action to spread awareness to others as well as staying informed ourselves. I am always excited at our meetings with the formation of new ideas regarding innovative ways to reach other students. Currently we are working on a plan to hold monthly movie/speaker nights to foster discussion on various issues.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that high school students don't have much free time. Our challenge has been coming up with ways to work awareness about civil liberties issues into everyday life through projects like installing a bulletin board in the main hallway of the school on which to post interesting articles and speaking about the ACLU and civil liberties in general to assemblies of middle school students. Our most basic efforts include describing the actions of this organization to the many students who have not heard of it. We delight in moments when we feel we have impacted the awareness of others at school. We were all pleasantly surprised when one of the school's self-proclaimed staunch conservatives became a member. Throughout my efforts I have been reminded of the importance of thinking critically and listening deeply and thoughtfully to the ideas and opinions of others. By showing motivation and caring about the issues of civil liberties we can spread excitement to others and slowly but surely begin to combat the notion that my generation is one of apathy. This is a long process but one worth working towards.

The more I learn about the state of civil liberties in America, the more I am convinced that organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union are imperative for the future of democracy. I will always stay involved and work to do my part to help. I am inspired by the leaders who work tirelessly to safeguard civil liberties in my own community and I aspire to live my life with passion, intention and action, following their example. Throughout high school I have shown initiative in spreading the message that civil rights are vital to our existence and that youth must be involved. I will continue my work in college and in my eventual career.