



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Student Meghana Sharma's Two-Year Metro Youth Advocates Journey & Introduction of Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer

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Prior to entry into the program that is Metro Youth Advocates, I bought into a certain narrative. A narrative that perpetrated this idea of the lack of a valid voice that youth had in our surrounding community. That young people as a body had not reached a certain point in their respective lives to have a seat at the table, much less even try and work for one.

After entry into this program however, I realized that this narrative was a total and complete lie. That my age is something that should be seen as an advantage, rather than a disadvantage. As something that empowers me, rather than something that disenfranchises me.

We as youth are consistently told that we are the leaders of tomorrow, but the real truth that I have discovered due to this program is that we aren't. *Because we are the leaders of today and tomorrow and everyday thereafter.* Leadership and ability to work to improve your surrounding community is not a skill that is randomly received when you cross a certain threshold of age, but instead it is something that is cultivated and aspired to. Youth represents a value beyond age, but rather it is a principle that bears a promise of innovation, creativity, empathy and a desire to change our surrounding communities.

I, like all of my fellow young people in this room, have learned to advocate for our communities and fight for the kind of change we believe in thanks to this program. Because of MYA, I have discovered my desire to fight for women's healthcare through campaigning for both reproductive justice and increased access to information towards cervical cancer prevention, as well as arguing for comprehensive sex education in my community. Furthermore, I am not only able to understand the wide range of interested stakeholders in our community but I am able to walk away each year inspired to make change throughout the community. MYA engages youth on a level where we are able to be the changemakers we seek to in our communities, therefore affecting tremendous change in Metro Louisville.

Youth carries a power with it and no one understands that more than our supporter, Mayor Greg Fischer. Under his terms, our city has grown tremendously, centering on three main goals of making Louisville a city of lifelong learning, a much healthier city and an even more compassionate community. Recently Mayor Fischer worked to create the Cradle to Career learning initiative, by signing a commitment to improve student performance with JCPS and achieving a record level of citizens earning college degrees. He worked to reduce overall violent crime by implementing the recommendations of a citizen work group on violence and the creation of the police VIPER response squad. Finally, he launched a citywide compassion journey by becoming the largest American city to sign the international Charter for Compassion, and creating the annual "Give A Day" community service week, which has led to much national recognition.

Besides his incredible accomplishments, Mayor Fischer has truly thrived by working with Louisville's citizens, particularly its youth, to further our community's progression-- something each of us in this room today hope to do. Now, without further ado, please welcome Mayor Greg Fischer.

- *Written & Delivered by Meghana Sharma
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