Westchester County Youth Councils
A program of Family Services of Westchester

Thank you for your interest in FSW’s Westchester County Junior and Senior Youth Councils. In this packet you will find our mission statement, descriptions of the Junior Council and Senior Council, frequently asked questions, and programming highlights. Becoming a member of the Westchester County Youth Councils is a unique opportunity to join a rich history of youth leadership and to develop the skills to create positive change in your peer groups, schools, and community. After reviewing this packet and completing an application, please contact us to schedule a brief interview.

Thank you!

Kind Regards,

Marisa Ragonese
Program Director
106 N. Broadway
White Plains, NY 10603
914-358-5566
mragonese@fsw.org

Chloe Fernandez
Program Coordinator
106 N. Broadway
White Plains, NY 10603
914-358-5571
Chloe.Fernandez@fsw.org

Mission

The mission of FSW’s Westchester County Youth Councils is to promote civic engagement among youth in Westchester County. The Westchester County Youth Councils consist of two distinct groups: The Junior Youth Council and The Senior Youth Council. These countywide, youth-led, multi-issue advocacy programs are designed to empower and equip young people to create positive change in their communities. The Youth Councils create opportunities for youth to cultivate valuable leadership skills and exercise them through a wide variety of youth-led community service, advocacy, and activism initiatives.
Junior Youth Council

The Junior Youth Council, a program for middle school youth ages 10-14 years old, meets our mission by supporting members in identifying the issues that matter to them and organizing opportunities to learn more and take action through community service and advocacy projects.

Junior Youth Council projects have included creating their own community garden, crafting their own hand drums, advocating for youth issues to the Westchester Board of Legislators, fundraising for pediatric cancer, making clay seed spheres, and helping to clean up the Hudson River waterfront.

The Junior Council also gets the chance to enjoy fun activities and trips to art exhibits, rock climbing, ballet workshops, local farms, and social justice events. Junior Council members are able to increase knowledge, self-efficacy, and autonomy as they practice the creative and practical skills necessary to create change.

Senior Youth Council

The Senior Youth Council, a program for high school youth ages 14-18 years old, meets our mission by providing training on leadership and advocacy skills and strategies to put those skills into practice. Members organize events and projects to address the issues that are important to them. Members become active voices on these issues through participation in forums, round-table discussions and public hearings. Senior Council members collaborate with local governments, commissions, task forces, schools, and community organizations, thus developing and implementing their agenda while building their skills as leaders.

The Westchester County Youth Council FAQs

Q: What is the Westchester County Youth Council?

A: The Westchester Youth Council is a youth-run multi-issue advocacy program. The program consists of youth representatives from throughout Westchester County, with a diverse mix of ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Interested youth are appointed to the WCYC after an initial application and interview with the Director and the Program Coordinator, after which they become full-time members.

- The WCYC is split into two distinct groups: The Junior Council (ages 10-14) and the Senior Council (ages 14-18).
- The Junior Council meets every Wednesday from 3:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
- The Senior Council meets every Wednesday from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
- Weekly attendance is preferred but not required.
• All meetings are held at FSW’s Lanza Family Center for All Ages, 106 North Broadway, White Plains, NY.
• Food is provided for members during the meeting.
• Transportation is available for local members, but not guaranteed.
• Members are required to RSVP to weekly events and activities.
• The WCYC provides all programming free of charge to its members!

Q: What do Youth Council teens do?

A: Youth Council members:

• Develop and promote a county-wide youth-action-based agenda
• Interact with local governments, commissions, organizations, task forces and individuals to raise and address the interests of youth, while becoming more aware of community leaders and their concerns
• Interact with other agencies, which assists in developing and implementing their agenda in the form of training, education, events, advocacy and other activities
• Create long lasting relationships with peers and adults working towards creating lasting change in our communities

Q: How do WCYC participants benefit?

A: Westchester County Youth Council participants receive:

• Leadership and advocacy training
• Friendship and peer support
• Valuable community service experience
• Recognition throughout Westchester County
• Community service hours
• College application and resume building
• Opportunities to go on fun and interesting trips

Q: What agencies are involved in the Westchester County Youth Council?

A: The Westchester County Youth Council is the product of an alliance between:

• The Westchester County Youth Bureau
• The Westchester Children’s Association
• Family Services of Westchester

Q: What has the Youth Council accomplished?

A: Here are some sample programming highlights:
• **African Drumming Workshop:** Junior Council members participated in an African Drumming workshop with Kojo Bey of the Obey Foundation. This was a unique opportunity for youth members to make their own hand drums using wood shells and animal skins from Ghana, West Africa. Members not only learned about the labor needed to string up and tune the drums, but also the processes of carving out the drum shell and drying out skin for the drumhead. Members also received a cultural history lesson, detailing the importance of drum making in West African societies and the roles that drummers filled. The two-day workshop concluded with members being able to take home their own rope-tuned, hand-carved hand drums.

• **Task Force on Family Issues:** The entire WCYC participated in the first, and all subsequent, Public Forums on Family Issues, hosted by the County Legislators’ Task Force on Family Issues. The evening was centered on creating a list of rights all people deserve in Westchester County. Youth Council members came prepared to discuss the need for anti-peer violence training in high schools and more access to areas that provide self-directed recreational and leisure activities.

• **Conflict Resolution Training:** Senior Youth Council attended conflict resolution training and in-depth workshops exploring and challenging stereotypes, particularly racial stereotypes, and generating ideas about how they could use their skills to interrupt stereotypes in individual and group settings, as well as on a structural level.

• **Columbus Day versus Indigenous Peoples Day:** Junior Council members participated in a discussion/workshop that dealt with unpacking the historical context of Christopher Columbus and what he has come to symbolize. They also talked about reclaiming Columbus Day for indigenous peoples and ways to advocate for indigenous rights here in Westchester.

• **Citizen Responsibilities:** Junior Council members participated in a workshop that looked at the responsibilities of citizens of the United States, the continuation of a prior conversation about the rights that come along with citizenship. Members connected their responsibilities as citizens to current events, specifically recent shootings and the Syrian refugee crisis. The discussion finished by talking about what they can do as youth leaders and advocates to make sure that people’s rights are protected, and that it is their responsibility to do so as citizens of the USA and the world.

• **Gathering Policy Solutions for Kids:** The Senior Council attended the Gathering Policy Solutions for Kids conference organized by the Westchester Children's Alliance to help generate a county-wide agenda for programs serving youth and children.
• **Dignity for All Students Act:** As the sole representatives of young people in attendance, several WCYC members attended and spoke at a meeting of legislators and academics to discuss the impact of the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), New York’s anti-bullying law, on school climate for youth most frequently targeted for harassment and bullying; WCYC spoke on behalf of youth in Westchester and across the state, delivering speeches that addressed the need for pre-service training about racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of systemic discrimination.

• **Food Justice Committee Potluck:** Junior Council members participated in the WESPAC Food Justice Committee’s potluck event; ‘Celebrating our Communities Self-Reliance’. This event focused on individuals within the Westchester Community and the greater Hudson-Valley area whom are striving to make change around agriculture.

• **Bully Documentary:** The Junior Council members participated in a viewing and discussion of the documentary ‘Bully’. The purpose of the exercise was to take a look at effective anti-bullying materials and also educate themselves about the issue of bullying, and the different forms it takes across the country. The discussion after the movie was about ways in which the council could make their own type of film about bullying to be shown in schools or PSA which gives updated and realistic depictions of bullying and what can be done to combat it.

• **Common Threads Conference:** Senior members participated in Candle’s annual Common Threads conference and retreat. Our members learned about various LGBT issues including being an ally, homophobia, what gender identity is, and participated in a variety of arts-based and team building events and activities.

• **Lobbying Workshop:** Senior council members attended a two-day conference and lobby day hosted by the NYS Youth Bureau. Participants learned about how to speak with elected officials, attended sessions on this year’s talking points including the Raise the Age campaign, and funding for youth programs.

• **MLK Institute Conference:** The Junior Council members, along with a number of Senior Council members participated in the annual MLK Institute’s ‘Ending Violence, Building Hope’ conference.

• **Healthy Friendships:** Junior Council members participated in a workshop hosted by Planned Parenthood, who presented their curriculum on Healthy Friendships. This workshop allowed the junior council members to think of bullying in terms of their own personal relationships and dynamics of power that they encounter.

• **Community Garden:** Junior Council members worked on building up the WCYC Garden at 106 N. Broadway and seeding the different beds. The Junior Council worked with local
farmer, Doug DeCandia on turning a vacant soil bed into a 6-bed garden capable of growing food throughout the growing season.

- **Riverkeeper Riversweep**: Junior Council members and a number for the Senior Council members participated in the annual Riverkeeper Riversweep, where hundreds of groups throughout the Hudson valley come together to pick up trash along the shores of the Hudson River.

- **Juneteenth**: During June, the Senior Council learned about and participated in the annual Juneteenth event in White Plains. Members learned about the history of the celebration, about emancipation, and discussed contemporary manifestations of Black slavery and racism.

- **Seed Spheres and Mindfulness**: The SYC hiked around Cranberry Lake and dispensed homemade “seed spheres” (see below!) to help beautify the area with local flowers. Members also participated in a meditation and learned about the benefits of utilizing local parks. We also enjoyed a private yoga lesson on Rye Beach. The members learned about and practiced mindfulness.

The Junior Council members, along with members of the Senior Council participated in a community workshop on making seed spheres and guerilla gardening, sponsored in part by WESPAC and the Clay Arts Center of Port Chester. The workshop was focused around using clay (from the Clay Arts Center), compost, seaweed, and assorted vegetable and flower seeds (from WESPAC) to make seed spheres which act as garden catalysts for underused areas. Participants made close to 100 seed spheres that will be dispersed throughout White Plains and the greater Westchester area.
Thank you for your interest in joining Youth Council! Upon receiving your application, we will contact you to schedule a brief interview. **PLEASE RETURN YOUR APPLICATION TO:**

Chloe Fernandez  
Program Coordinator  
Family Services of Westchester  
106 N. Broadway, White Plains, NY 10601  
Phone 914-358-5571  
Email Chloe.Fernandez@fsw.org
WESTCHESTER COUNTY YOUTH COUNCILS PROGRAM

TRANSPORTATION PERMISSION FORM

RE: Child’s Name: ____________________________

D.O.B. _______________ Referred by: ____________________________

The staff of the Westchester County Youth Councils Program have permission to transport the above named child for program activities.

PICK UP AND DROP OFF PLAN

___ I agree to be present at pick-up and drop-off of my child.

___ If I am unable to be present for either pick-up or drop-off, I authorize the following person(s) to represent me: ____________________________

___ My child is over 15 and may be dropped off to an empty home or apartment.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

• Alternate numbers for caregivers (cell, work, etc.) ____________________________

• Alternate numbers for caregivers (cell, work, etc.) ____________________________

Other Emergency contacts (family, friends, neighbors etc.)

• Name/Relationship: ____________________________ Contact info: ____________________________

• Name/Relationship: ____________________________ Contact info: ____________________________

• Name/Relationship: ____________________________ Contact info: ____________________________

Signature of Caregiver/Legal Guardian: ____________________________ Date: __________

Address: ____________________________

Witness Signature ____________________________ Date: __________
MODEL RELEASE FORM FOR PHOTOGRAPH AND VIDEO

2975 Westchester Avenue, Suite 401
Purchase, NY, 10577
phone 914.937.2320
fax 914.937.4902
email fsw@fsw.org
web www.fsw.org

I hereby give to Family Services of Westchester (FSW)

A) The unrestricted right and permission to copyright and use, re-use, publish and republish photographs and video of me or in which I may be included intact or in part, with no restriction, in any and all media now or hereafter known for promotion, advertising or any other purpose whatsoever. I understand this is not for commercial purposes, but to promote and advertise Family Services of Westchester and its programs, and I waive any rights of compensation.

B) I also permit the use of any printed material in connection therewith.

C) I hereby relinquish any right that I may have to examine or approve the completed product or products, or the advertising copy or printed matter that may be used in conjunction therewith or the use to which it may be applied.

D) I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Family Services of Westchester, its legal representatives and all persons functioning under its authority from any liability by virtue of any blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or use in composite form whether intentional or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the taking of said picture or video or in any subsequent process thereof, as well as any publication thereof, including without limitation any claims for libel or invasion of privacy.

E) I hereby affirm that I am over the age of majority and have the right to contract in my own name or for my minor child. I have read the above authorization, release and agreement, prior to its execution; I fully understand the contents thereof. This agreement shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives and assigns.

NAME: ____________________________________________

SIGNED: ________________________________________ DATED: __________

ADDRESS: ____________________________________________

CITY/STATE/ZIP: ____________________________________________

WITNESS: ___________________________________ DATED: __________