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## Making the Shift from Clients to Activists

Dec. 23, 2011 ? laura

*This post is the final blog in a series from Laura Wadden, GSA Network's National Programs Manager, who just returned from a 9-day road trip through Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois.*

During a recent road trip, I crossed five Southern and Midwestern states, where I met with almost 50 youth and adult GSA movement leaders.

In over 40 hours of meetings, one question kept popping up: ?How does my organization involve youth in activism??

My first thought? Good question. In fact, great question. Many members of the National Association of GSA Networks, particularly [Illinois Safe Schools Alliance](#) [1], have done breakthrough work engaging youth in activism. At [GSA Network](#) [2], we empower youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools and have extensive experience working with youth activists.

[//www.growingamericanyouth.org](http://www.growingamericanyouth.org) [3] For organizations that have been serving LGBTQ youth for over 20 years in St. Louis, Louisville and Indiana, this question marks an important shift. It is an organizational culture shift from youth as recipients of service to youth as powerful agents of change.

So how do our organizations involve youth in activism?

The core of involving youth in activism is youth leadership and youth empowerment. Conferences are a great way to build skills so that youth have the tools to organize in their own communities.

*Photo Courtesy of Growing American Youth: <http://www.growingamericanyouth.org> [3]*

- [Growing American Youth](#) [3] just held its largest-ever GSA Conference this past September

in St. Louis, Missouri. Over 120 students from 35 schools attended the event, which offered workshops like "Art & Social Justice" and "Knowing your Rights".

- [Louisville Youth Group](#) [4] had their first-ever [GSA conference](#) [5] in February of this year.

Some groups are going even further by asking questions like, "How can we involve youth in more leadership roles?" and "How can we shift organizational culture so that adults value youth as powerful decision-makers?"

To answer these questions, we discussed new ways to involve youth on the board of directors, curriculum specific to GSA activism and social justice, and youth-led peer-to-peer training models.

The shift is challenging, and vitally important. The peer network of the [National Association of GSA Networks](#) [6], along with GSA Network, will continue to work together to build the capacity of organizations to make that shift.

To learn more about the National Association of GSA Networks, visit our website, or contact Laura Wadden at [laura@gsanetwork.org](mailto:laura@gsanetwork.org) [7] or 415-552-4229.

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#### Links

[1] <http://www.illinoissafeschools.org>

[2] <https://gsanetwork.org/>

[3] <http://www.growingamericanyouth.org>

[4] <http://www.louisvilleyouthgroup.org>

[5] <http://www.manualredeye.com/2011/02/14/louisville-y/>

[6] <https://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-nation/national-association-gsa-networks>

[7] <mailto:laura@gsanetwork.org>