

About the SNWA Youth Advisory Council

The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) has a strong history of commitment to public participation through citizen advisory committees and other venues. Because the youth of Southern Nevada represent the future, the SNWA Board of Directors felt that it was essential that they be included in making decisions that will affect them in years to come. The inaugural SNWA Youth Advisory Council was formed in January 1999 at the request of the Board. The initial group of students reported to the Board in January 2000. Now completing its eighth year, the Youth Advisory Council is one component of H2O University, the SNWA's educational program.

The goal of the Youth Advisory Council is to provide a forum in which the SNWA can receive structured and unstructured input from the youth of Southern Nevada on issues of importance to the SNWA, and on environmental and water issues that the youth see as pertinent to this community. The objectives of the council are to include Southern Nevada Youth as stakeholders in SNWA activities, gather ideas from a youthful perspective, receive input on current SNWA programs, strengthen the SNWA's relationship with the Clark County School District, and offer learning activities and leadership experience for the council members. The Youth Advisory Council is slated to report and bring recommendations to the SNWA Board of Directors on an annual basis.

Previously, public and private high school principals have been asked to appoint a representative to sit on the Youth Advisory Council for one year. This year, science teachers and counselors have also been involved in the selection process, as they tend to have more day-to-day interaction with the students and may have a better feel for which students would really contribute to and be passionate about the environmental issues that

the Council would be taking on. Also, two students from each high school were invited to participate this year instead of only one in previous years to create more synergy within the group. Students were selected based on their involvement, leadership qualities and interest in water and environmental issues. This year, 20 students represented 16 high schools from Southern Nevada. The list of the 2006-2007 Youth Advisory Council members and the high schools they represent can be found at the end of this section. Catherine Muir and Jordan Bunker, Springs Preserve Senior Education Specialist and Management Aide respectively, coordinated and facilitated the Council's activities.

Before we would be able to produce ideas as a Council, begin a project, and provide meaningful input, we first and foremost needed to become an educated team - a knowledgeable unit of many working together as a whole. For this reason, the 2-day kick-off, held April 3-4, 2006 was full of icebreaker games, teambuilding activities and brainstorming exercises, intermingled with enlightening presentations from guest speakers on the history of water, local and global water issues, water conservation and water quality. By the end of this workshop, not only had we become better-acquainted and built trust with one another, but we were armed with the tools, knowledge and passion that would be needed to develop a project that would truly make a difference.

From April 2006 to April of 2007, we met twice every month to decide on an area of focus, share information, develop and follow a strategic plan and work together to ensure that the successful execution of our project would make a difference in and beyond the community. The following report describes the project and related activities of the 2006-2007 SNWA Youth Advisory Council.

Project Selection

Midway through the second day of the Y.A.C. kick-off, we had the opportunity of meeting with Pat Mulroy, Water Authority General Manager. She introduced us to “Running Dry,” a documentary film created to raise awareness of the global water crisis. We were all moved and called to action by the images and situations portrayed in the picture. It truly helped us to understand the gravity of the world water situation. None

“We were all deeply moved by Jim Thebaut’s documentary, ‘Running Dry.’ The documentary helped us understand the gravity of the situation. I don’t think that any of us looked at water the same way again.”

-Katrina Concepción

of us would look at water in the same way again.

Not only are we more grateful every time we turn on the faucet, but it has inspired us as a Council to take a more action-oriented role in building a conservation ethic within our community.

After the film, we engaged in a deep dialogue with Mrs. Mulroy. The question burning in everyone’s mind was, “What can we do?” Her answer was simple: “Start small. Recycle.” None of us had ever made the connection between recycling and water conservation, but after researching the subject, we were impressed by the following facts:

- **By recycling 1 ton of paper, 7,000 gallons of water are saved.**
- **One ton of recycled paper uses 50% less water than one ton of paper products from virgin wood pulp**
- **The state of Nevada has a residential recycling rate of 2%, which is abysmal compared to similar cities of the same size.**

Now aware of the strong impact that recycling has on water conservation and the environment, we decided that the most effective way to increase recycling efforts in southern Nevada was not only to educate and include the community on the issue, but more importantly, to build a conservation ethic that will continue to flourish well into the future.

We came to a consensus that the people whom we could most effectively reach were our own peers. Not only did we begin to promote recycling to our fellow students and school administrators, but we also initiated official recycling programs in our respective high schools.

Mission Statement

Once we had a general idea of where we wanted to go with our project, we needed to establish a mission statement that would not only encompass our own goals, but also call the community around us to action, so that even when this particular project is over, the excitement and knowledge about the importance of recycling and water conservation will remain. With this in mind, we devised the following mission statement:

"The global water predicament will require countries to come together to solve problems that are not only environmental, but entangled with numerous political, economic and social issues as well. Although it may take giant changes for a solution to be found, we must begin with an informed society."

"Encourage water conservation by instituting a student recycling program that both instills environmental ethics and calls the residents of Southern Nevada to action to provide a sustainable water supply for future generations."

Project Design & Implementation

With the mission and the project focus now established, the first step was for us to pitch the program to our respective high school principals. Upon meeting with our principals and other administrators, we learned that some schools already had existing recycling programs, but that they were failing due to poor exposure and participation.

Also, while most schools were eager to get on board with the recycling program, there were some whose administrators required much more encouragement than others, and a few that were completely uninterested.

"We decided that recycling was definitely a good idea, and that we could achieve the most results with it. Individually, we met with our principals, promoting our recycling program and convincing them it was greatly needed and that it would not be good for the school to let this problem go unnoticed."

**-Erin Sundberg
Cheyenne High School**

We wanted to ensure that our project was designed in such a way that our progress and success could be easily and accurately tracked. In order to revive the existing unsuccessful programs, and in most cases, initiate a program from scratch, we partnered up with the Abitibi Paper Retriever paper collection system, which provided designated bins to each of the participating high schools. Working with Abitibi enabled us to provide a convenient drop-off for recyclable paper and measure exactly how much paper was being recycled on a weekly or monthly basis.

Policy

The current Clark County School District policy regarding recycling is as follows:

"The superintendent and administration of the Clark County School District support the principle of recycling materials used in day-to-day activities of

the district and teaching of the conservation ethic to both students and staff. As recycling and conservation opportunities develop within the community, staff will analyze cost/benefit factors and implement recycling and conservation activities which are financially viable or which have sufficient environmental impact to justify additional cost to the district.”

While this policy lays a nice foundation and opens the door to potential future recycling opportunities, we believe that more can be done to truly call staff and students to action and hold them accountable for sustaining successful recycling efforts. In an effort to embolden the message the school district is sending through its policy, we have altered it and will be working with Keith Bradford, the Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance to polish it and present it to the School District superintendent within the next few weeks. The new policy that we developed is as follows:

“The Clark County School District strongly advocates the conservation efforts of both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to, recycling everyday classroom materials, promoting environmentally friendly efforts, teaching conservation ethics, etc. The superintendent and administration are highly concerned with the environmental welfare of the community. Therefore, the Clark County School District will make the greatest possible strides to implement environmentally conscious programs that are deemed financially viable, educationally compatible, and ecologically significant.”

Community Partners

Without active and motivated community partners, our project never would have gotten off the ground. Rick Madsen, Las Vegas Area Manager for Abitibi, was always

willing to make himself available to meet with the Council as a whole or to meet with individual students and their contacts at their respective schools. He provided us with

"Abitibi Paper Retriever and the Clark County School District supported our decision to do a recycling project. With their help, we were able to more effectively reach out the entire community."

**-Nadia Rivera
CCSN High School**

recycling bins whenever and wherever we needed them and provided us with the information that was necessary to gauge and track our efforts. Unfortunately, due to the already poor recycling efforts of the community, the Abitibi Paper Retriever Company was forced to shut down towards the end of our project.

Another valuable asset throughout our project was the partnership we had with Bridget Bilbray-Phillips, Director of the CCSD School-Community Partnership Program. She was always eager to listen to our plans for the project and give us very helpful advice when it came to communicating with our school principals.

Activities & Events

In order to get the public involved and truly aware of our efforts, the importance of our mission and the change that can be made, we wanted to do more than just report our accomplishments to the Water Authority Board. In an effort to truly spread the word and importance of our message, we have organized a gala to which we have invited members of the public, elected officials, School District administration and our own friends and families. This would be the best way to convey our passion, bring others on board with our cause and commence a grassroots effort that will hopefully develop and grow throughout the community.

The gala will be held at the International House of Blues at Mandalay Bay on March 19, 2007 in coordination with World Water Day, which is celebrated on March 22. It will revolve around a viewing the movie "Running Dry," which is what inspired us to begin our project in the first place. Because it had such an enormous impact on us, we are hopeful that it will have the same effect on all those who see it. In addition to viewing the film, Water Authority General Manager Pat Mulroy will address the audience, as well as "Running Dry" director, Jim Thebaut. We will also be sharing our own remarks on what inspired us, the project we worked on, the impact it has had on us, and the community and what the future holds.

This event will give us, as Council members, the opportunity to convey our newly acquired interest in environmental stewardship to others. We expect our passion to spread throughout the gala so that our guests will leave not only with an education on local and world water issues, but also knowledge of what they can do to make a difference and a fervent resolve to actually do it.

Benefits of a School District-Wide Recycling Program

It is becoming increasingly important for our youth to learn of the importance of conservation ethics. Recycling, as it relates to environmental stewardship and water conservation is a habit that needs to be acquired early on in life and implemented just as much at home and at school. We feel that by putting a School District-wide recycling

"The best way to educate the community about water conservation and recycling is to start with the youth. These are the people that will one day be sorting out southern Nevada's problems, and it's up to us to fight the drought problem starting now"

-Haley Frischnekt

program into action, these habits will be instilled in the students and they will carry those practices home with them.

We hope to eventually inspire the entire community to recycle, so that people realize not only the efforts currently being made in the valley, but also the other opportunities that are out there. This program has already directly impacted thousands of high school students. Not only are they the engine that makes our recycling program run, but it is our hope that they will take these new ideas and share them with their friends and family everywhere.

Recommendation

Southern Nevada residents need to adapt the mindset that we live in a desert, and that, in order to successfully sustain our growing community, we must not only be educated on environmental stewardship, but we must implement the ethics necessary to make a difference. The Council therefore recommends that the SNWA maintain its relationship with the youth of southern Nevada and the Clark County School District to enhance environmental education through alternative means, such as recycling. We are convinced that if this is done effectively, we, the leaders of tomorrow can begin learning disseminating information to our families and friends now, and extinguish potential crises such as drought, before they start in the first place.

Conclusion

After becoming aware of the serious water issues currently confronting our community and the rest of the world, we could not help but be concerned and spring into action. We believe that if the recycling program we have implemented can continue to be handled by responsible and proactive citizens, it will continue to grow and greatly contribute to current efforts of building a more sustainable southern Nevada. We firmly believe that as more and more information is disseminated and more people get involved,

a sentiment of environmental stewardship will begin to flourish throughout the community.

This project has not only called us to action to make a difference on an enormously important global issue, but has armed us with so many tools that we will be able to use for the rest of our lives. Our newly enhanced skills of leadership, public speaking, teamwork and perseverance to name only a few, will be highly beneficial to each and every one of us as we take on all that life has to offer, from college, to careers and families, and anything else that may be in store for us.