

KARA HENRY - INSPIRE COLORADO
Inspire Award Essay 2016-17

Over the past two years, Inspire Colorado has played an extremely important role in my life. As I served as an Inspired Leader and, eventually, an Inspired Fellow, I realized just how rare it is for someone my age to be aware and take advantage of the opportunity we have to affect change in government, regardless of age. As I walk the halls of my high school every day, I hear arguments over politics and complaints about our system of government, but I never hear about the efforts these students are making for improvement. My passion for civic activism was spurred for this very reason and that passion was one key to my success. Registering people to vote can be exhausting and tedious, but with each registration, I felt empowering. Even though I was just prodding each of them into taking their first step to being civically active, I felt like I was amplifying their voice that, I hope, will not stop speaking for the rest of their lives. Another key to my success was the flexibility and support that I received from the administration of Cherry Creek High School. Each voter registration drive took intensive planning, and I am so thankful for the administrators who were always more than willing to help out. The final key to my success was the cohesiveness and energy of the other Inspired Leaders, Inspired Fellows, and Program Coordinators who I was lucky enough to serve with. Between our very personal discussions at Leadership Academy and our brainstorming sessions for getting more registrations, every minute that I got to spend with each one of them was, not so ironically, inspiring.

One challenge that we experienced this year was trying to target students who had not already been registered. In a school as large as mine (850 seniors), it can be very difficult to reach every student with our promotions to get registered. For voter registration drives, we would typically see the same groups of students on their off-periods or in between classes. I know the majority of my senior class, but I am far from knowing every person, so it can also be difficult to register students when I do not know where to find them or do not even know if they are in my grade. I definitely feel like our team at Creek improved our outreach strategies through brainstorming and working together. However, I know we still have a long way to go. Some of the ways that we reached more students were through classroom presentations and having a drive on Senior Day. We were able to target seniors specifically by presenting in senior-only classes. This helped us promote our mission while also registering students who we had not seen before. On Senior Day, we were able to accumulate plenty of registrations because all seniors had to come through the Postgraduate Office at some point that day. Another idea that we came up with for next year was having a table at registration before school starts next fall. This would be helpful because while students are getting their student ID photos taken and getting their parking permits, they could also register to vote.

I am so excited to be attending Western Washington University next year. I plan to join clubs and be involved in my new community. I really hope to run for a position in Associated Students, the student government. One of the Vice President positions has a focus in government. The person in this position is the representative in the local and state government for Western and is responsible for registering students to vote. I hope to use my past experiences with Inspire to continue promoting civic activism. Through this position, I would be able to make Washington a better place for my fellow students by allowing their voices to be heard by state and local officials, as well as Western administrators. I cannot wait to see where this next chapter of my life will take me and how my unforgettable experiences with Inspire will continue to influence the way that I choose the live.