

The Commonwealth of Kentucky Youth

The hardest part of getting high schoolers to register to vote is convincing them that it is important to do so. How do you explain that voting is the glue of democracy, to a teenager who shares none of your passion for political engagement? How do you convince an eager-to-graduate senior that our great nation has always relied on citizens using their fundamental right to visit the ballot box, especially when that senior cannot relate to your own deep excitement about American history? After an exhausting number of attempts to instill a sense of responsibility for politics within my classmates, my Inspire team-mate and I decided to scrap our old method. We had been passively sitting in the halls, waiting for students to approach us and ask all about what interesting cause we were promoting. We expected everyone to think like we do, be interested in the same things, and want the same things that we want. That clearly is not the case.

So what we did then was go directly to the students instead of waiting for them to come to us. We changed our presentation, so that instead of focusing on our own reasoning for why we vote, we asked people theirs. We focused on the voting power of the youth population, demonstrating visually that our generation has a large amount of influence that is just waiting to be used. We went to every single junior and senior English class over the course of one week, calling it “Lafayette Voter Registration Week” to raise awareness. The efforts over this 5 day period resulted in huge results, with about 250 registrations completed in school.

This success can be brought down to three essential elements. One, we stayed diligent and kept direct and constant contact with our students and teachers, making sure that things moved swiftly and smoothly. Two, we kept the topic of voter registration hot on everyone’s mind. It was purposefully very hard to ignore the daily announcements and class visits all crammed into this short period of time. Third, is that we were continually adapting our presentation to make sure that we were stirring up a true interest in work we were doing. I could honestly feel the attitude towards voter registration shift in a room from before to after we gave our spiel about it.

Being apart of Inspire has been monumentally empowering for me. I have been given this opportunity to quickly and quite easily involve hundreds of young people in something that I am incredibly passionate about. I have never been more proud of any work that I’ve done, and I have never

been surrounded by more vivacious and constructive discourse than when I was registering new voters. These--and I do love saying it--new voters, know that they have a tangible way to contribute now. It's almost like when you treat young people like they deserve to be apart of the discussion, then they will gladly join in! That is what I will take away more than anything from this whole year. I am graduating from high school this year, and attending a college in Kentucky, because I want to continue to bring young people into the conversation. We want responsibility, we want a platform, and I want to provide that by using the skills I have, and will develop within my community. It is the simple things like registering to vote that give young people the confidence to speak about about things that we care about. Seemingly small ideas like this are what the youth will continue to use and spread, defining a bright future for our beautiful state of Kentucky.