

Grassroots Activism

Being an active citizen, politically or socially, is never easy, but it's always exciting and empowering. Many of us are moved by a variety of educational needs and interests in our families and in our communities, including:

- children who have difficulty in school,
- children who can't get to school,
- young adults with continuing education needs,
- older working adults with commensurate educational needs,
- people with learning differences and special educational needs,
- foreign language students,
- finding or supporting alternative learning options,
- improving community educational options,
- enhancing libraries
- expanding access to technology

And so much more. But how do we act? When have a need and don't know where to turn; when we see a need and want to help fill it; when we want to reach our community representatives or legislators; when we want to speak out against an injustice or in support of a good effort - what do we do? Can we be effective? Can we possibly know enough to be useful? Is it even worth trying?

In *Soul of a Citizen*, author Paul Rogat Loeb writes,

..."The main distinction between those who participate fully in their communities and those who withdraw into private life doesn't rest in the active citizens' grasp of complex issues, or their innate moral strength. Instead, those who get involved view their place in the world very differently. They have learned specific lessons about approaching social change: that they don't need to wait for the perfect circumstances, the perfect cause, or the perfect level of knowledge to take a stand; that they can proceed step by step, so that they don't get overwhelmed before they start. They savor the journey of engagement and draw strength from its challenges. Taking the long view, they come to trust that the fruits of their efforts will ripple outward, in ways they can rarely anticipate."

Whatever your interests, whatever your goals, for yourself or for your family, you can and should be actively involved in your choices. There are lots of resources, online and off, to help guide your efforts. Most importantly, you don't have to go it alone - there are others out there, just like you, with similar needs, interests and concerns. It's just a matter of connecting with one another to have your voice be heard, your efforts felt, the world made a little better.

Use the resources we've collected here to help you get started, and let us know of others you find along the way. And as you journey, remember the words of Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people can make a difference,. in fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

Read on for a look at some useful resources.

Organizing for Education

Your grassroots interests and efforts will no doubt be determined by your personal needs and goals. There is no shortage of resources for those working on behalf of education in their communities. Many resources are already linked in our Civic Resources Guide, as well as within specific Resource Guide categories for public, private and home education, but here are a few specific ones you may find of interest.

Whatever your interest, there are some very basic grassroots organizing principles that can make your effort more effective. From the Grassroots Activist's Handbook, which is designed to help organize environmentally focused activism, but contains useful advice for all types of efforts. The Handbook identifies these essential elements:

- Decide on the goal of your campaign.
- Assess community attitudes.
- Have a spokesperson.
- Do your homework.
- Find an angle that motivates people to take action.
- Build your campaign on a sound foundation.
- Create a well-designed one-page overview of your effort
- Learn to use media effectively.
- Seize unexpected opportunities.
- Be Prepared for public meetings:

Here are some additional resources for public education activism:

*Oregon Education Association: Become an Education Activist:

<http://www.oregoned.org/>

*Public Eye : Organizations Defending Pluralist Modern Public Education

http://www.publiceye.org/research/directories/edu_grp_defend.html

*And a list of "education activist groups" at <http://www.politicalindex.com/sect10.htm#7>

For school choice, you may find these resources helpful:

*The Citizens Guide to Education Reform

<http://www.schoolchoices.org/index.html>

*The Alliance for School Choice

<http://www.allianceforschoolchoice.org/home.aspx>

For Home Education

*Check out this great Homeschool Diversity Project idea, for introducing yourself to legislators

<http://www.homeedmag.com/blogs/groupnews/?p=163>

*How and Why Homeschoolers Should Be Involved in Local and State Politics

http://www.vahomeschoolers.org/pdf/involved_politics.pdf

*Education Policy Primer for Homeschooling Families

<http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/articles/edpolicy.html>

*A good article at the National Home Education Network website

<http://www.nhen.org/nhen/pov/editors/default.asp?id=81>

And don't forget to make liberal use of our Civic Resources and our Voter Guide to help you learn how to contact legislators, write letters, and connect with resources, organizations and other individuals who can help you make a difference!

For Student Activism

The Freechild Project has created a Youth Voice Toolkit , a resource for Youth Voice activists and practitioners around the world.

The Freechild Project Youth Voice Toolkit includes:

* Youth Voice Glossary

* Assumptions about Youth Voice

- * Principles of Youth Voice
- * Keys to Youth Voice
- * Cycle of Youth Voice
- * Guidelines for Youth Voice
- * Honoring Youth Voice
- * Youth-Adult Relationships Spectrum
- * Cycle of Youth Voice
- * Discrimination Against Youth Voice
- * Myths About Youth Voice
- * Youth Voice Assessments

There is also an extensive collection of resources and other tools. Explore it at <http://www.freechild.org/YouthVoice>

The Freechild Project

<http://www.freechild.org>

