

Be A Part of The JOBS Movement—Take a Stand Against Violence

A group of teen workers and students from St. Stephen's Church on Shawmut Avenue was tired of experiencing violence in our community. "I can't walk home after dark without talking on my cell phone with my mom. She is scared to death that someone will attack me on my own block", says 18-year-old Adelvia Gomez from Dorchester. Luis Troncoso, a 20 year old from Dorchester, was shot multiple times and killed by a young teen in broad daylight less than two weeks ago—another example of a young person who died violently and too soon. Some teens are even fearful that their organizing to end violence may put them at risk. "I'm often fearful of what being proactive against youth violence will mean for my life—how can I speak out about violence without putting my own life in danger?" says 15-year-old Angel Gutierrez from Dorchester.

We, the JOBS (Justice and Opportunities for Boston Students) Team, decided that we had to do something to stop the violence currently keeping our peers from reaching their full potential as leaders in our respective communities. We have transformed the resources we have—a small basement at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, fellow students and administrators at our high schools, the media, other leaders from St. Stephen's Church—into real power. We have organized, become educated about budget policy, and lobbied our state legislators. We believe we have the right and the ability to be responsible civic leaders! We want to contribute to the positive growth of our communities instead of the growth of teen violence.

Since January 1, 2008, fifteen people under age 25 have been killed, with many more injured or arrested. Unfortunately, we expect that these numbers will only grow as we approach the summer because more students will be out of school and spending their summer months on front stoops, standing on street corners, or just getting involved with the wrong crowd. The lives of many teens could be changed dramatically for the better with more opportunities for meaningful employment at summer jobs. We know this to be true and speak from experience because we have had great jobs through the summer program run by St. Stephen's.

The JOBS Team has asked Massachusetts legislators to increase the state budget by \$2.5 million in order to increase the number of summer jobs for our peers. Last year, nearly 8,000 teens applied for summer jobs through the Boston Youth Fund (BYF). However, due to limited funding, fewer than 3,500 teens actually received jobs. We have dedicated our time and energy to lobby our representatives and senators to convince them that teens and our concerns deserve attention and resources, even though we are under the voting age. We believe more jobs for teens are a good investment for the state. Jobs not only keep teens off the streets and out of trouble, but they also are cost effective because teens get a jump-start in building responsibility, leadership, and the real-life job skills they need to become successful in the future. Other kinds of violence prevention, such as more police officers on the street, do not have these same positive spillover effects.

Last week, the JOBS Team made a huge breakthrough! An amendment created in the House added \$1 million to the Youth Works budget line, one of the sources of funding for summer jobs for the City of Boston. However, we are still \$1.5 million short of our goal and we are asking for YOUR help.

We need more motivated young people, leaders, organizers, community organizations, fellow churches, and all others who care about teens and our community to take a step to support this important effort. Contact your State Senator and ask that the funding for Youth Works be increased. Members of our coalitions have already been featured in the Boston Herald, attended youth rallies at the State house, and worked with other organizers throughout the Boston area. Our momentum is only getting stronger and we are hoping you will support our movement.

We ask is that you put yourself in our shoes. We experience the death of one of our peers on an all too often basis; these are teens who could have had a different life if provided with more leadership opportunities. We refuse to remain helpless and we do not believe this is a hopeless situation. We have the collective power to change the trend toward violence. The time to take a stand is now! Save lives and join us in advocating for more funding for summer jobs for teens!!

Authors:

JOBS Team members

Jaissa Feliz (17 years old, South Boston)

Adelvia Gomez (18 years old, Dorchester)

Victor Mejia (15 years old, Dorchester)

Angel Gutierrez (16 years old, Roxbury)

Emerita Torres (St. Stephen's Teen Organizing Intern)